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WITCH OR WIFE?

(THE CARTARET AFFAIR.)

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By ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE.

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THE CARTARET AFFAIR

I ARRIVE AT CLIFTON.—Page 8.

WITCH OR WIFE

(THE CARTARET AFFAIR)

BY

ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

Author of "DR. JACK," ETC.

"You yourself have seen, Mr. Peters, that our friend Tom has a secret that he hugs to his heart in a desperate fashion."

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THE CARTARET AFFAIR

CHAPTER I

MY FELLOW-TRAVELER ON THE 7:30 EXPRESS

The 7:30 morning train from New York draws up at the suburb of Clifton on time. But two passengers alight, and one of these chances to be myself, plain John Peters. It is a pleasant change from the air of the city, and as I stretch my limbs upon the station platform I look with satisfaction upon the trees clad in their rich autumnal foliage, and draw huge draughts of the frosty air into my lungs. A carriage is to meet me here, but as I fail to see any signs of a vehicle, I am forced to believe it has not yet arrived; so I walk up and down to keep the blood circulating, for the car has been uncomfortably warm.

The odor of a prime Havana drifts across my olfactories, and draws my attention toward my fellow-passenger, who seems to be waiting for some conveyance as well as myself, and is also tramping up and down at one end of the station platform.

He is a medium-sized gentleman, quietly but neatly dressed, and with a face darkened by exposure to tropical suns. I am fond of studying physiognomy, and before I have glanced at this party twice it is a settled thing in my mind that he has seen a great deal of the world. It may be that he is an adventurer of some sort, or a wealthy "globe-trotter;" but at all events he has studied life under many a foreign sky.

My speculations are interrupted by the appearance of an old family coach drawn by a splendid pair of bays, with an ancient darky on the box whom I recognize as Uncle Jethro, who has been in the service of the Cartaret family from boyhood, growing up side by side with old Marse Luther, to whom he is devoted as a slave.

Stepping over to get my bag, when I look around again the dark-faced traveler is speaking with Uncle Jethro, who obsequiously opens the carriage-door for him, somewhat to my surprise. Then, he is bound for the quaint Cartaret mansion, as well as myself—perhaps some friend of young Tom, whom he has met on his travels.

One can indulge in all manner of speculation without worrying over a matter, and I had this affair settled in my mind while watching my fellow-passenger enter the vehicle.

Uncle Jethro has his orders, and he looks about him for the other passenger; whereupon I step up,

greet him by name, and announce my readiness to accompany him, if he will toss my bag up in front, which he does in a solemn manner that gives me a chill, for the old darky has always seemed a jovial soul.

"I trust you do not object to my smoking, with the glass down," remarks a quiet voice, and I find myself face to face with the bronzed gentleman whose mission seems to correspond in a degree with my own.

"Not at all," I immediately reply, being a smoker myself, with a decided sympathy for the yearning after a soothing weed.

The bays need no urging, but start off along the road, and I settle back to enjoy the bracing morning air. My companion eyes me curiously, and doubtless is puzzled to make out what my exact status in society may be. I can admire him for one thing—he knows how to keep a still tongue in his head, for, finding that I do not open up a conversation, he ventures to make no remark.

We pass through the town of Clifton, already throbbing with activity, and reach the suburbs of the place.

I have been here before, and am in a measure familiar with my surroundings. While driving through the main street of the town, I notice that in many places men are gathered in knots, and seem to be talking seriously; but as the election

season is near at hand, I can lay this suppressed excitement to that cause, though I wonder why more than one among them points toward the well-known Cartaret carriage, and I feel the gaze of the whole knot fastened upon my face, for my companion has drawn his hat down over his eyes as though studiously avoiding inspection.

Beyond the town we come to quite a long hill, the slope of which is just steep enough to cause the bays to fall into a walk. Thus we pass the smithy of the old blacksmith, who ceases to scatter the sparks with his sledge, and coming to the door, looks after us in a way that rather arouses my curiosity. Surely, strangers are no novelty in Clifton—why should we excite so much attention?

Who can account for the vagaries of the human mind? Somehow I seem to connect this curiosity of the townspeople with the solemn air of our black driver, and a peculiar heaviness falls upon my spirits.

Can anything have happened to my old college chum, Tom Cartaret? I had a letter from him only a few days before, and fancied at the time he must be brooding over something, but accepted his invitation to come up to see him, spend a few days at the house, and then go off for a week's gunning up in Pike County, Pennsylvania, and—well, here I am, on deck at the time I appointed.

A thought strikes me, and I lean forward.

"I say, Uncle Jethro, did my gun and traps arrive yesterday?" I ask, and am surprised at the look on his ebony face as he turns in his seat to answer me.

"'Deed they did, Marse John—I kerried 'em to de house myself."

"How is young Mr. Cartaret?"

"Marse Tom? he as well as could be 'spected."

"And his wife?" I continue, determined to discover the cause of the darky's lugubrious aspect.

"She berry well, I reckons."

"I suppose the old gentleman is enjoying his usual good health, uncle?"

While I speak, I realize that my companion has raised his head to survey the darky; and yet the circumstance hardly makes any impression on my mind, for, to my astonishment, the solemn look leaves Jethro's countenance, to be succeeded by one of actual horror.

"Gorry! Marse John, 'pears like you don't know," he groans, and my interest awakens with a jump.

"Then, suppose you enlighten me, uncle."

"Marse Luther's done dead!"

At that a genuine shock as of electricity passes through my system—it is so entirely unexpected. I confess that the first thought I have is a selfish one, since my plans for a week of sport with

Tom must now be given up; but I put it away with a feeling of shame, and try to think of my friend in his sudden bereavement.

So far as I know, Tom Cartaret has always lived in harmony with his father, and when a man loses his sole remaining parent, he is certainly to be pitied.

"When did this happen, uncle?" I continue, for in his letter Tom has spoken of all being in their usual good health.

"Last night, Marse John."

"It was sudden?"

"Berry. Dese things always am."

"What was his disease, uncle?"

"Dar was none, unless it am of de mind. De ole marse hab been murdered, or else he done commit susancide," returns the negro, in an awed tone of voice, looking, not at me, but toward my fellow-passenger, who continues to smoke quietly, as though perfectly deaf.

"Good heavens! this is terrible! Poor Tom!" I exclaim, as I picture my friend in his sore distress. "Tell me something about it, uncle. In what way did he meet his death?"

"Dey found de marse dead early dis mawnin'—you kin hyar all about it when we gits dar. I don't know nuffin'—I'se only a pore ole ignorant nigger, but I done growed up wid de ole marse, an' I reckon I'd a laid down an' died for him ef

he ask me;" and as the black man turns his attention to his horses, for we are now at the top of the rise, I catch the glisten of a tear rolling down his cheek, and feel a sort of dumb pity for the poor fellow who has lost so good a friend.

We drive on, and I find much to ponder over. My profession is that of a lawyer; and although young in years, I can without egotism say that I have done well in my calling, giving promise that, with years of study and application, I may win both fame and fortune, both of which await the right kind of a man at the New York bar.

My mind being well equipped for wrestling with such matters, it is natural that I should take more interest in the case than most persons. Until I learn the particulars of the sad tragedy, however, I do not feel as though I dare form any opinion of its merits, and occupy myself in vague speculations while the carriage rumbles along the shaded pike, with Uncle Jethro paying strict attention to the horses, although, furtively watching, I discover him several times wiping his eyes with his sleeve.

Thus we draw near the Cartaret homestead, and I nerve myself for the sad meeting with dear old Tom, when I had expected such a joyful occasion. Pondering upon the strange turn taken in fortune's wheel, I wonder what fate has brought me here, of all mornings in the calendar year.

Can it be that I am needed—that my presence may be a source of strength to Tom in his hour of distress?

Murder or suicide—both ugly words in the eye of the law—which would it prove to be? Was there a dark cause back of the deed? Must this quiet home be overrun with prying minions of the law; the country coroner, with his curious jury, probing into family secrets; the old detective searching for clues in the most unheard-of and cob-webbed corners; the bustling newspaper reporter, eager to supply facts for his sensational sheet, and if they are denied him, just as ready to manufacture them, without regard to common decency?

Heaven forbid! And yet it is the common fate that overtakes a household, no matter how secluded and retired its members may have been, where death has entered in a suspicious manner. I know more than a little about such things, as my business brings me in contact with all manner of people seeking advice.

We are by this time at the gate, which is open, and Uncle Jethro drives straight in. It is only now I remember I have a companion in the carriage, and the thought strikes me that he must be a singular man indeed to hear such shocking news without commenting on it. As I turn to look at him again, I find that he is leaning out of

the window and surveying the scenery along the drive.

"A noble property, this Cartaret estate. Strange that trouble is no respecter of persons," he says. I am not sure whether he addresses me or mutters to himself; but before I can think of replying I see Tom Cartaret under the trees near by, and stopping the carriage, jump out.

Tom is looking badly—deuced pale, and not a little worried, as though the terrible event of the morning has unstrung his nerves. As I advance toward him, I notice that he seems to look beyond me, toward the carriage, and that there is a certain uneasiness in his manner. Turning my head, I discover that my *compagnon de voyage* has changed his seat, and it is upon him that Tom Cartaret gazes as might a bird at the serpent that has charmed it. The vehicle rolls on, the dark-faced man waves his hand courteously, and I find myself alone with Tom.

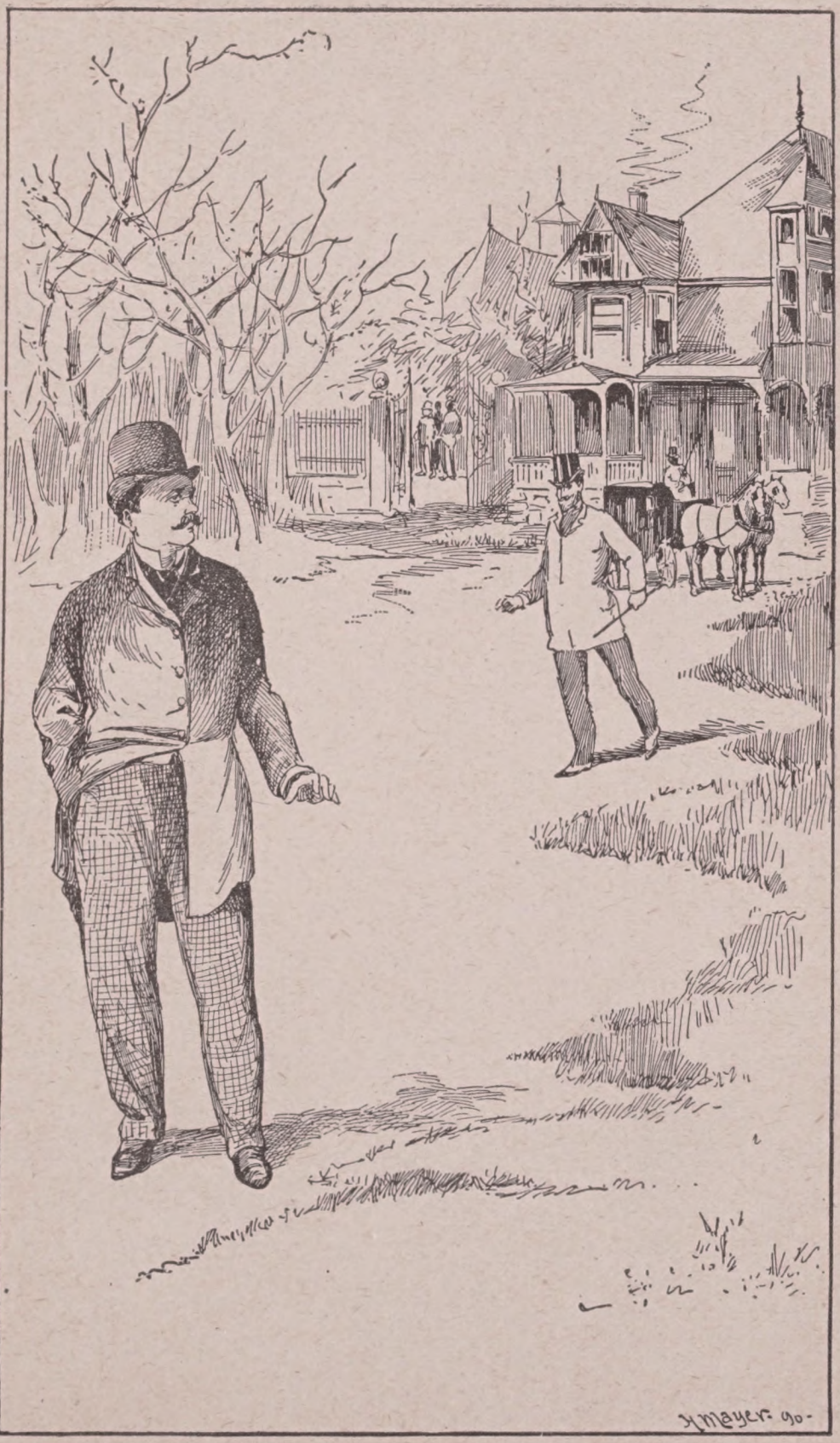
CHAPTER II

TOM CARTARET, BENEDICT

In days gone by, Tom Cartaret and I have seen a good deal of each other. First, we were roommates and chums at Yale—and that means lifelong friendship. Then, both of us were fond of sport, so that each year we had taken our outing in company, generally up in Maine or the Adirondacks; and around the camp-fire the bonds formed at college were doubly cemented, for there is nothing, I am of the opinion, that draws two congenial souls together into closer union than to spend weeks in company off in the wilderness.

Under these circumstances, it can be seen and readily understood that Tom's trouble is mine also—he is as dear to me as ever a brother could be. When I take his hand I endeavor to make him understand this in the expressive pressure—words are so feeble at a time like this, so cold when one desires to extend sympathy—a glance from the eye, the clasp of a warm hand, how much more they contain than the best of phrases!

Still, I feel as though I must say something.



TOM CARTARET AND MYSELF.—Page 15.

Tom and I are used to being confidential, though I have felt lately as though our pleasant bachelor friendship must have come to an end when he married.

"This is a terrible thing Uncle Jethro has been telling me, Tom. I never had such a shock in my life," I manage to say.

"John, it is something awful! Words can't describe my condition of mind. And to think that my last words with him were bitter ones! I shall never forgive myself—never!" and he groans dismally.

I am interested, of course—my legal training has taught me to pick up the points in a case and apply them as might a skillful detective.

"If you had hot words with him, Tom, do you believe that was reason for your father to take his own life?"

At that he turns upon me sadly.

"Where did you get that notion, John?—from Uncle Jethro, I suppose. You may as well dismiss it at once from your mind. Father was in his sound senses, and no man detested the idea of suicide worse. He did not take his own life."

His earnestness is convincing, and I feel something of a shudder pass over me. In one breath Tom artlessly deplores the fact that on the previous night he and his father had quarreled, and

in the next declares it his firm belief that murder has been done.

I shiver, because I am aware of the fact that a detective on the case is bound to put two and two in a line whenever they harmonize, and surely here is evidence of a theory that must be looked into.

Of course, I do not hint at such a thing to Tom—there will be time enough for that later on, if necessary.

I ask him to tell me all he knows of the sad occurrence; for when one is in a state of mind bordering on distraction, it is often a relief to the feelings to talk, and I really believe my friend will be better if he can engage in conversation.

"Briefly, then, John, my evidence is this: I left father at a quarter to twelve, sitting in his chair in the library. Our dispute had been bitter, but we had shaken hands at the end of it, and parted in something like a friendly way. I retired at once, but could not sleep for perhaps half an hour, because my mind was disturbed by what had passed. When I arose this morning it was just growing light, and my head throbbed wildly, for I had passed a restless night. I had just finished dressing when I heard sounds of great confusion below—a succession of shrieks from Chloe, our old servant. With that I ran hastily down-stairs, and came upon the old aunty in the

hall. She was crying in a sort of hysterical manner, and as I took hold of her wrist to draw her hand from her face, she gave a shriek. 'He's done dead—he's lyin' in de room all covered wid blood! De good Lor' help us!' she cried. With that I threw her from me, and guessing who she meant, sprang to the library door and entered. It was a sight, John, I shall never forget to my dying day. My father sat bolt upright in his chair, his eyes staring and glassy, a look of horror upon his face, as though his fate had come upon him suddenly, but had paralyzed him with fear. A weapon had been plunged straight into his heart—I believe he must have died without another breath.

He presses his hands fiercely against his throbbing temples; I can see his eyes are red, as though little sleep had come to them during the preceding night. It is natural for Tom to feel terribly over the tragic fate of his father, and yet somehow it impresses me that he is not the man I knew so well to-day. Perhaps the bitter memory of that last quarrel with the parent who is no more, crushes him—I know *something* causes him to turn his eyes away from my gaze, to appear nervous, and very unlike his usual self.

Presently he recovers, and goes on with assumed calmness:

"When I reached a condition that I could think,

I found both of the servants sobbing beside me. I hurried Jeth over to old Doctor Craig, who soon joined me. Acting on his advice, I sent word in to police headquarters in New York, and they wired back that they would send a man out at once to look into the matter. Doctor Craig said this ought to be done—I was so broken down that I couldn't think for myself."

"It was right, Tom. If your father has been brutally murdered, justice demands that the truth be discovered and the guilty one punished."

To my surprise, he shivers and lets his head fall.

"I suppose that is right," he says, wearily, "but it will not bring father to life. I have never been in favor of earthly vengeance, you know."

"Good heavens! man; this is simple justice. Would you let the fiend who took your father's life go free, to boast of the deed, and perhaps repeat it on the first occasion? You owe it to his memory that you hunt the assassin down and place the rope around his neck."

"Let us talk of something else, John—I am not myself just now."

Poor fellow! he does look fagged out; and yet I can hardly lay his strange actions to this cause alone. As I have known Tom so long, I believe I can reasonably gauge his character, and I have always understood him to be rather inclined to-

ward a Quixotic disposition. If any person hurt a friend or spoke against one he loved, he would be up in arms instantly.

Hence I cannot understand his present meek disposition, when it would have been natural, under the circumstances, for him to be terribly anxious for the apprehension of the villain who has murdered his father.

Tom does not seem himself—secretly, I am obliged to confess that a great change has come over him since his marriage.

I have not met his wife. It is partly for that I have consented to remain a few days at his home ere starting on our hunting trip. Tom married abroad somewhere, and his letters gave me the idea that he was head over heels in love with his charming Madge. I had only hoped she was worthy of Tom Cartaret, for I believed him to be the best fellow alive.

This reminds me.

"Where is your wife, Tom?" I ask.

"I believe she is still asleep. She seldom gets up before seven or half-past, and this morning she appears to be sleeping unusually heavy," he replies, looking in the direction of the house, seen through the crimson-garbed trees.

Tom, whom I used to believe the acme of frankness, will not look me in the eye—he feels the shock strangely.

"It will be a terrible blow to her," I remark.

"Yes, indeed. I would that I could save her from it, but that is impossible," he mutters.

"Everyone will soon know of it—the country coroner must come and pry into all your family matters. Poor Tom! I feel for you."

"I know it, John. I have foreseen this from the start, but it is inevitable," with a twitching at his lips that bespeaks nervousness.

"Come," he says, arousing with an effort, "let us go to the house. You will want to see for yourself the terrible sight. I have not allowed a thing to be moved. Besides, he may want to see me."

"To whom do you refer?"

"The detective they sent up."

An idea flashes into my mind.

"Good heavens! is that quiet, dark-faced man who came with me, a detective?"

"I presume so—he is a stranger to me."

I remember his actions, and can well believe it to be so; and yet he was so gentlemanly and quiet, and so entirely different from the fussy, important officers I had come in contact with in the city, that I am somewhat surprised. All the same, I mentally decide in my own mind that this party is a deep one, well calculated to discover what truth lies hidden under the mysterious death of old Luther Cartaret.

Side by side we walk toward the house. Tom is unusually silent, and knowing that his thoughts must be connected with the sad event that has descended so suddenly upon his house, I do not break in upon his reverie.

Once or twice I find myself wishing I had remained in New York, or gone elsewhere for my vacation, but my better self spurns this idea as unworthy of my manhood. Tom Cartaret is my dearest friend, and Tom is in deep trouble, so that he really needs my assistance. Looking at it in that light, my coming seems to be in the light of a fortunate fate.

We reach the house. All is silent about it, and well this may be, since under that roof lies the victim of a secret crime. Stirred as I have never been in connection with any event in the past, I prepare to follow my friend into the house of mourning. I feel for Tom in his sudden bereavement, and besides, there is a peculiar sense of wonder with regard to his actions that worries me. As yet, I have not had time to analyze it, but this must soon come, when I can sit down and with a steady hand draw aside the curtain that conceals the facts.

Tom walks firmly along the hall. Not a soul do we meet. The dining-room lies at the end, and the library half-way down. Beyond this is a little sleeping apartment used by the old gentle-

man of late years. At the library door Tom stops, laying his hand upon the knob. He turns his head to speak to me, and I am again impressed with the singular whiteness of his usually ruddy face.

Tom Cartaret, benedict, is not the same man I knew as a bachelor—that is quite evident. But perhaps I am unjust; the present cruel circumstances must account in a great measure for his looks. When a man has his nerves badly shattered, as Tom's must naturally be, he is hardly accountable for peculiar looks or actions.

I let it pass—it is so easy to find excuses for friendship.

"Prepare yourself for a terrible sight, John. It will be a shock," he says, quietly, and yet I can see he is about to enter the room with the greatest reluctance himself.

"I am ready—lead the way, Tom."

With that he pushes open the door, which is ajar, and we enter the library, to look upon the victim of the mysterious crime.

FINDING THE BODY OF TOM'S FATHER.—Page 25.

CHAPTER III

A DARK STAIN ON A DRESS

Although neither a doctor nor a soldier by profession, I have always flattered myself upon the possession of strong nerves. In more than one instance during my life this fact has been tested to my satisfaction, and under the circumstances, I enter the library prepared. Nevertheless, I am conscious of a strange, shuddering thrill passing through my frame when I catch my first glimpse of that grim figure seated in the easy-chair, his head fallen back, the open, glazed eyes staring at vacancy, the hands clutching the arms of his chair, as if in sudden agony, and a dark stain on the rug covering the hard-wood floor terribly suggestive of crime.

It is a spectacle I shall never eradicate from my mind—those sightless, staring eyes will haunt me at times all my life. I feel it, I know it, and yet do not shrink away—indeed, after that one shudder, the scene no longer has any terror for me. I have experienced all the horror, and could now even assist to lay the body out, if it were necessary.

There is a sort of horrible fascination in the sight, and I have to make an effort to tear my gaze away. Tom stands near me, but his eyes are fastened upon the end of the room, as though something there claims his attention.

"That is a spectacle for a son to remember!" he says, in a bitter tone.

"Tom, my friend, you must arouse yourself; throw off this singular incubus that seems to be weighing you down; be a man."

With that he turns a haggard face upon me, and the look in his eyes tells more plainly than words the state of his mind.

"Would to God I could, John! but I feel as though I would be better off if I were lying there beside my father."

I am mystified at these words, and eye him suspiciously, fearing that Tom may be going out of his mind. No doubt he takes the quarrel with his father grievously to heart, since death has forever placed a reconciliation out of his power. Remorse is merciless indeed when it tugs at the human heart, as many a wretched son or daughter has learned to their sorrow when bending over the loved form whose lips of clay will never again utter a mortal sound.

From my heart I pity this friend of mine. Knowing him so well, with his usual bright, sunny nature, I wonder what mockery of fate this is

that deprives him of a father just after his first quarrel with that parent.

An awful thought comes unbidden into my mind, but I banish it instantly. Who would dare suspect Tom of such a stupendous crime? and yet men have before now, in a fit of sudden passion, committed deeds of which in their sane moments they would have been horrified at even the thought. If Tom Cartaret did this foul thing, he must have been crazy when he made himself a parricide.

What can I say to cheer him up? I feel powerless to utter words of sympathy, and he does not seem to arouse himself even with the natural idea of hunting down the slayer of his father.

While I stand thus bewildered, groping in a fog, as it were, I hear the library door creak on its hinges, and catch the rustle of a dress. Turning my head, I see an apparition—as lovely a woman as my eyes have ever beheld, with bonny brown hair, the softest of eyes, and a form that Hebe might have envied.

This is Madge—Tom Cartaret's wife. She has taken a step or two into the library, with a smile on her face for Tom, then seeing he is not alone, and noticing his strange looks, she stands there, the smile frozen on her face, so to speak.

In the silence that ensues for nearly half a minute, I gaze entranced at this charming picture,

and mentally forgive Tom for throwing up the sponge in the arena of bachelordom. With such a witch to cast a spell over one, who would not surrender?

Madge is dressed in a morning robe of some light, creamy texture, and my eyes are at once attracted to a spot near the hem—a dark patch of a brownish hue—such a color as a splash of blood might make when dry.

Great heavens! what a shock goes through my system at sight of this stain, which is evidently unknown to the lovely wearer—but pshaw! I would as soon think of suspecting myself as this sweet creature.

My attention is at once taken up with Tom, who at sight of his wife seems greatly excited.

He endeavors to get between the ghastly form reclining in the chair and Madge, and in this succeeds, but forgets the pier-glass at the end of the room.

I can see her give a horrified glance into that, and know she has looked upon all. She takes one step forward, her hands are raised toward her husband in a pleading way; her lips move tremulously, and I catch the words:

"Tom—husband—in mercy's name! tell me this is a dream. Oh, my God! can it be possible that he is dead?—and—you—"

The words die away faintly on the air. Tom

Cartaret springs forward just in time to catch his wife as she swoons. I am at his side instantly, and endeavor to help him; but he turns upon me almost fiercely—so unlike the Tom of other days.

"I can carry her to her room alone—wait for me here, John."

Of course, I fall back—they are one, and no other person should touch her but him; so I walk to the window, while Tom, powerful fellow that he is, easily gathers the form of his wife in his arms and carries her away.

Left alone in that room, with the body of the dead man to keep me company, I fall to ruminating and indulging in speculations.

These latter are only vague as yet, but they serve to make me deucedly uncomfortable.

What if Tom, in the heat of anger, or when temporarily crazy, has done this unnatural deed, and his wife suspects him?—that would be a situation for the display of emotions intense enough to satisfy the most exacting.

At any rate, I feel that the shadow upon the house of Cartaret is bound to grow darker, and that Tom's happiness is doubtless ruined. The breeze coming through the window starts the door—I hear it creaking, and then comes the bang, which causes me to start, even though prepared for it.

A few seconds later, someone touches me on the shoulder, and I experience a peculiar sensation while turning my head, as though half expecting to see old Luther Cartaret standing there.

Instead, it is the dark-featured gentleman who was my companion on the 7:30 express from New York. I realize that he has doubtless been in the room all the while—it was his hand that started the library door on its swinging journey.

"I beg your pardon, sir. You are Mr. John Peters, a New York lawyer, I believe—heard of you, and know your reputation as a square man. I am the detective sent out here at the request of Mr. Tom Cartaret"—with an emphasis on these words that made an impression on me—"to investigate the strange death of his father."

I hardly know what to say. Ordinarily, there is nothing repulsive about this person, who looks and acts like a gentleman; but somehow, when I associate him with Tom Cartaret and his wife, I feel a sort of repugnance toward him.

He does not await any reply, but strikes at the root of matters in a frank way that goes far toward eliminating my distrust.

"Mr. Peters, there is no need of my commenting upon this sad event. My business is to find out who the guilty party may be. As an esteemed friend of the family, you could give me considerable assistance if you were so minded."

"I didn't come here to act the detective," I mutter.

"True; but in assisting me you may be able to help your friends. Surely, it is their wish to have the guilty punished."

I remember Tom's rather strange action in the premises, but wisely keep it to myself.

"Of course, Tom desires the truth known. I myself feel that, in justice to the dead, this should be done."

"It will be done anyhow. Such a crime as this cannot be hidden in order to save the family publicity."

"I realize that, and in the hope that I may be of service to my friends in some way, I promise to render you any assistance in my power."

He looks at me quietly, and proceeds:

"Do you promise that, Mr. Peters?"

"I do, sir."

"Perhaps you do not realize what it may come to. Suppose I should hint to you that the circumstances strongly point toward Tom Cartaret as the person most likely to have taken that wretched man's life?"

I draw a long breath, and yet seem to be wonderfully calm, considering the awful nature of his charge. This probably comes from such a suspicion having darted into my brain before.

"I believe I have not heard your name?"

"Call me Smithers."

"Well, Mr. Smithers, you can rest assured of one thing: I have known Tom for years, and if he turns out to be guilty of this thing, you may depend upon it, the man was out of his mind when it was done. In his right senses, Tom Cartaret would never injure the man he reverenced as his father."

"Very probably what you say is true, sir," he replied, without the semblance of a smile on his sphinx-like face. "He's a gentleman, every inch of him; but even gentlemen will sometimes fly into a passion, you know, and do things in a minute's ugliness that they may regret all the rest of their lives."

The deep significance of his words assure me that already Mr. Smithers has a suspicion with regard to certain events.

Memory carries me back to a certain occasion when I saw my friend Tom fly into a sudden passion. A brute of a man was beating a child in a cruel fashion. Tom and I came upon the scene suddenly. I saw his face grow black as a thunder-cloud, and with one spring he was upon the wretch, whom I verily believe he would have killed then and there, only that I drew him away in time. Since that time I knew that jovial Tom could fly into a horrible passion if there was sufficient grounds for it. Who could tell what

cause his father may have given for allowing this demon of a temper to spring up? Perhaps in his hot anger he had spoken disrespectfully of Tom's wife—insulted her, it might be—and the younger man, blinded with fury, had forever stilled the tongue that goaded him.

This is a speculation, of course; but the fact of Smithers striking so near the root gives it deeper significance in my eyes.

"Have you discovered anything that causes you to look toward Tom for an explanation of this dark mystery?" I ask boldly, hardly believing he will answer me frankly, for I am aware of the fact that these men do not exchange confidences, as a general rule, unless they expect to profit by the transaction.

"There are several things that serve to implicate young Mr. Cartaret; and while he is engaged in restoring his wife to her senses, I may as well speak of them to you, since you have so kindly agreed to further the ends of 'ustice."

CHAPTER IV

SMITHERS

I am perfectly conscious of the fact that Smithers is drawing me into the case—perhaps he sees a way to make me useful, and while under ordinary circumstances I might resent such action, there is a peculiar fascination about this affair that causes me to overlook my pride and swallow the bait.

Besides, I am very anxious to hear what he has discovered; so, with a glance toward the door to make sure that Tom is not returning, and a second look at the silent figure in the arm-chair, I assume an air of expectancy.

Mr. Smithers lays a hand upon my arm, as if to rivet my attention; there is no need of this, for I am only too anxious.

"In the first place, I have reason to believe, from certain facts I have picked up, that Tom Cartaret and his father were engaged in a loud and angry dispute last night, well on toward midnight. That is a very suspicious circumstance—as a lawyer, you realize that."

"Yes," I reply; "but if guilty, he would not tell the circumstance immediately."

"Did he relate it to you?"

"Yes; and sorely lamented the fact that his last interview with his father should have witnessed the only quarrel they ever had."

"Yes, yes; by the way, did he tell you what the cause of the trouble was?"

"He did not."

"Ah! that would probably figure strongly in the case; but we will have to do without it. Do you know the relation that generally existed between father and son?"

"It was a cordial one." I am only too glad to give this sort of evidence.

"You have known Tom for years—tell me if you have ever seen him fly into a passion."

I hesitate; but his eyes are upon me, and I find myself forced to speak, so I relate the incident of the brutal parent whom Tom punished so severely for his cruelty. Mr. Smithers appears to take a mental note of the fact, and I fancy I can see a gleam in his rat-like eyes that betokens pleasure. It does not matter to him who he runs to earth, so long as he plays a strong hand and succeeds in his case. Human misery counts but little in his estimation when compared with the successful cornering of a criminal. The intricate moves upon the great chess-board of life may be made before his eyes, but he cares nothing for the means employed, so long as he is able

to eventually carry the game and cry "Checkmate."

"Well and good, Mr. Peters. In the brief time allowed me, while you two were talking in the garden, I believe I have discovered something that may throw a light on their quarrel," he says, taking a paper from his pocket.

"I do not care to hear it," I say hastily, for it does not seem the right thing that I, Tom's warmest friend, should be prying into his secrets.

"Since you promised to aid me in discovering the truth, you must listen."

"But when I said that, I did not know you suspected Tom Cartaret of the crime," I reply.

"That makes no difference; I count on your help," he returns, doggedly.

"See here, why do you insist upon taking me into your confidence? I am a lawyer, not a detective, and can hardly serve you in the way you expect."

Even that loop-hole is closed.

"Perhaps I desire the advice of a lawyer in the matter. At any rate, listen while I read this document, which I found lying on the table yonder, crumpled up, as though Tom Cartaret had hurled it from him in scorn."

And he began to read in low but quick tones. I could not put my hands to my ears, and besides, if this paper had any connection with the

death of Luther Cartaret, it must eventually come out in public court, so what could be the harm of my hearing it now? I presume men have their share of curiosity, too, and I could not for the life of me imagine what cause for a quarrel had come up between Tom and his father.

"Luther Cartaret, Esq.,—*Dear Sir:* As a lover of truth and justice, I desire to warn you against a person of your household who is not fit to live under the Cartaret roof. She I refer to is your son's wife, Madge. He met and married her in Paris, where she was living a gay life, and it is more than rumored was the cause of at least one duel between those who were sighing for her smiles. If you desire further proof, write to or call on Mr. Philip Gautier, —— Broadway, New York; and if you convince him of your friendliness and agree to keep his name out of the mess, I am sure he will pile up written and oral proof enough to make you cast this wretched girl from your house as though she were a leper.

"Believe me, respected sir, your obedient servant, Jules Garribrant."

The contents of the infamous letter stun me, and I must confess that the case does indeed look black for Tom Cartaret. If his father gave him that letter to read, and then declared that he believed the foul accusation—well, I don't

know what another man might have done, but I should certainly have been tempted to knock the man down, be he father or brother—perhaps Tom would do more.

Smithers watches me. The infernal rascal no doubt reads me like a book, just because I fail to possess a sphinx-like face, such as his own, and am verdant enough to allow my emotions full play instead of bridling them.

"What do you think of that, Mr. Peters?" folding the letter up as he speaks.

"On general principles, I would denounce it as an infamous production, brought about in a spirit of revenge by some enemy."

"Exactly; and if this is a base slander, there is all the more reason why Tom should go into a state of fury when it was handed to him."

I drop my head in some confusion, for what he says is really the truth. How these fiends of detectives do dig out a pit to engulf a man against whom they entertain suspicions! Heaven preserve me from falling under the ban of such a man as Smithers. How do I know, even now, but that he has a suspicion I may be connected with this terrible affair—really, I had better be careful, or he will weave his web about me, and convince me that I must be guilty of the crime. Circumstantial evidence is overpowering, you know.

"Would you mind letting me have that letter?"

"What would you do with it?" he asks.

"I might want to ask Tom's opinion of it, and again—well, perhaps, if I am down on Broadway, I could step in and ask Mr. Philip Gautier a few pertinent questions—as Tom's friend."

He smiles significantly, but hands me the letter, which I secrete upon my person.

"Whoever this Jules Garribrant may be, I pity him if he ever runs across those stalwart arms of yours, Mr. Peters. You are something of an athlete, I reckon."

"I belong to the Manhattan Athletic Club, and am a member of the boat club, which would account for my good muscles," I reply, not considering his remark out of the way, because my name is frequently in the papers connected with some entertainment or boat-race.

It is surely time for Tom to make his appearance—his wife must have recovered from her swoon by now. Smithers seems to have an idea to the same purpose, for, with a hasty glance at the door, he proceeds to take a package of newspaper from his pocket, which he unrolls.

"Here is another bit of evidence that may go against our young friend—the knife with which the fatal blow was struck."

The paper is unfolded, and lying in it I see a

knife, the blade of which has some spots of dried blood upon it.

"Where did you find this?" I ask, taking it up.

"Over in the corner yonder, where the horrified assassin may have hurled it when he realized what he had done in his passion."

"Terrible! terrible!"

"You see it is no ordinary knife—from the shape of it, I should say it was a blade used as a hunting-knife. I understand Tom Cartaret is fond of such sports, and this weapon must be his."

"You are mistaken there. See here, on the haft are the initials 'J. P.' Do you know what they stand for? I reckon John Peters would answer."

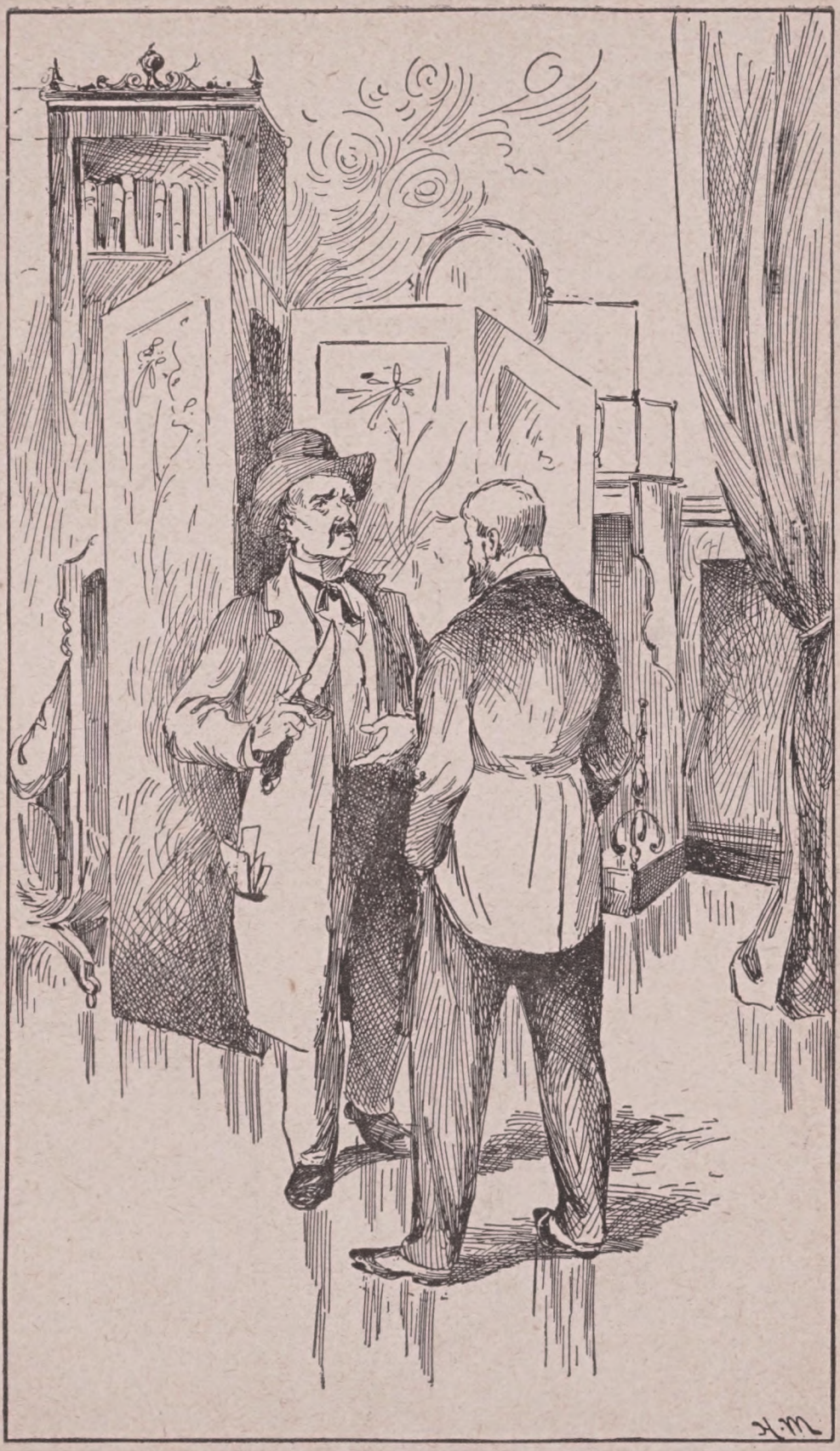
"Your knife?"

"Yes, sir; and never did I dream that it would be put to such a base use. That trusty blade has stood by me for years; but I shall have to believe there is a curse upon it now."

"May I ask how it came here? did you lend it to your friend?" rolling it up coolly, and replacing it in his pocket.

"I sent my traps up ahead—I believe I saw them lying on a table in the hall as I passed through. The assassin must have secured the knife there before entering the room."

"Ah! then, that goes to prove that the guilty one came from within, and not from without," he



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says, with a sardonic smile that drives me wild, for I realize what a wonderful faculty this man has for turning trifling things to account. I am but a puppet in his hands, so to speak; but loyal to my friend, I determine to remain in the game to learn the worst, and shield him if I can.

"Is it not possible that the assassin may have come from without?" I ask, faintly.

He motions to the windows.

"They were all fast as you see when I came in here—I questioned old aunty, who declares she locked the doors herself. It would seem, therefore, that the outside theory is in poor condition."

That adds another nail to the coffin, and I feel that Tom stands on a slippery place. Smithers seems to listen, and then says, quietly:

"He is coming; I will slip into the little room beyond;" and even as he speaks he is gone.

I breathe a little more freely when I have opened a window and let in some of the bracing fall air. Until now, I have not noticed how heavy the atmosphere is in the room.

Sure enough, Tom enters, and looking at his face, I see it more haggard than before. The late swooning spell of his wife has not succeeded in chasing the shadows from his countenance; indeed, it seems to me he looks worse. As his eyes are drawn toward the stiffened figure in the antique arm-chair, he trembles, and a pitiful

groan parts his lips. Is it repentance, or genuine heart anguish, that now influences him? I am not losing faith at all in Tom—that is as steady as a rock. He may be guilty, but if so, he knew not what he was doing—on that principle I am ready to base my trust.

"John, what miserable fate was it that brought you here just to be mixed up in this terrible affair? I would that you had not come," he says, looking me steadily in the face.

"On my part, I am glad I have come. You need a faithful friend just now."

"Heaven knows I do!" he replies, fervently.

"And I intend to stand by you, and see you through this wretched business, as a friend. Will you confide in me, Tom?"

He seems startled at my question.

"I—you see—confound it, John, of course I will. What do you mean?" he stammers, though I fail to see why he should be confused.

"Tell me all about this?" taking out the crumpled letter.

CHAPTER V

"TOM CARTARET'S WIFE!"

At last I have succeeded in arousing Tom from his peculiar melancholy condition. At sight of the letter his face shows an expression of surprise that quickly changes to one of anger.

"That accursed letter!" he growls; "where did you get it, John Peters?"

"It was found on the table here, just where you no doubt cast it after your interview, last night, with your father," I reply, coolly, at the same time keeping it out of his reach.

"Why don't you let me have it?" he demands.

"Because I wish to preserve it."

Suspicion flushes his face; he is in a condition to be ugly and unwise.

"John, are you in league with my foes—you, the friend I believed I could depend on?"

"What on earth makes you say that?"

"Why should you desire to preserve that infamous letter, which is a thousand times better destroyed? It is burned on my brain in letters of fire."

"That's where you have the advantage of me,

as my branding-iron don't work. I am preserving the letter in order to keep the name and address it bears. It was my intention, the first time I was in New York, to look up M. Jules Garribrant, as your friend, and either make him swallow the lie he has written or the letter that contains it."

At this Tom stares hard; then tears come into his eyes—blessed tears, that cool the parched and aching orbs—while he seizes my hand convulsively.

"John, I thank heaven for such a friend at a time like this! The strain was getting too heavy for me to bear alone."

"Then, share it with me, Tom."

Even as I speak I shudder, for there flashes into my mind the memory of the quiet man who is in the adjoining room, his sharp ears taking in everything that is spoken. What if Tom, feeling that confession is good for the soul, should suddenly commence to tell me how he was led to commit the terrible act? The idea is horrible—I cannot bear it. Quickly I add:

"Tom, there is no need of my asking you whether this base accusation is true."

"It is an accursed calumny. My Madge is as pure and spotless a girl as ever drew breath. Those who know her best love her most. But why do you, who have never met her, believe in her?"

I have succeeded in my attempt to draw him away from a confession, if such a thing had been on the tip of his tongue, and hence I continue, in a more deliberate fashion:

"Two reasons influence me: I have seen your wife—here in this room—and if I am any judge of human character, it would be hard to believe one possessing her face guilty of such things as this man charges her with.'

"Bless you, John, for those words!" he mutters, brokenly, passing his hand over his brow in a vague manner I cannot comprehend.

"My second reason is my knowledge of you; I believe you would never marry such a woman as this letter mentions."

"The scoundrel! he shall pay for his work."

"Who—Garribrant?"

"There is no such person. This letter was the work of Philip Gautier himself."

"Ah! I begin to understand—he used the other name simply as a blind."

"Like the coward he is! just like him to strike in the dark."

"Tom, who is Gautier?"

"A Frenchman who sued for Madge's love, and being declined, for she loved me, swore to be revenged upon us both. This is the way he takes that revenge."

That part is now clear, and there is no further need of dwelling upon it.

"Your wife has come out of her swoon, Tom?"

"Yes; it was a terrible shock to her."

"She seemed to associate you in some way with the awful crime," I cannot help saying, whereupon he gives me a most singular look, and I believe I see a light cross his face as of relief.

"Do you think so, John? I was afraid—" He does not finish the sentence, but sinks into a chair, burying his face in his hands.

His attitude is one of despair, and my heart aches for the friend whom I have known so long. He has a secret buried in his heart—a terrible one, I am afraid—and much as I would like to hear it, I dare not encourage him to confide in me now, with those hostile ears close by, ready to catch any incriminating evidence and use it against Tom.

All at once, Tom starts to his feet in excitement; at the same time I hear a voice above calling aloud—it is Aunt Chloe:

"Marse Tom! she done swooned agin. I kaint do nothin' wid her. Marse Tom, come quick!"

He flies out of the room—love beckons him on; and I never have a doubt with regard to Tom's affection for his wife

I would follow, and take a hasty step forward,

when I remember what Tom said to me before, and come to an abrupt pause. I am not wanted; and, indeed, a lawyer is of little use in a sick-room. Had I been a doctor by profession, the case might have been different.

As I turn again, I find myself face to face with Smithers, who smiles and nods.

"Very well done! Mr. Peters. I thank you for your valuable assistance in the service of justice."

"I don't know that I made even a point for you, sir."

"Ah! that is because you do not see behind the returns. My eyes are differently constituted, and I discover things where all is a blank to others."

"Indeed, Mr. Smithers, would you mind telling me what you discovered?"

He smiles in his peculiar way.

"You yourself have seen, Mr. Peters, that our friend Tom has a secret that he hugs to his heart in a desperate fashion."

I admit that with a nod.

"You believe you know—that is, you fear it—the nature of this secret; but you are wrong."

At this I open my eyes wide with astonishment. What in the world does the man mean? Of course, I suspect what Tom's secret is—more than suspect, for I believe I know it.

Instead of making any remark, I remain quiet, and Smithers goes on:

"When I was talking with you before, Mr. Peters, it looked almost positive that Tom Cartaret was suffering the pangs of remorse for a deed done in the heat of passion. Since then, certain little things have come to my notice that have in a measure changed my views."

"Indeed!" is all I say; but that one word can contain volumes at times.

I am as yet all in a fog with regard to his meaning—not the faintest gleam penetrates the mist surrounding me. Left to myself, I must grope around without much chance of seeing success ahead. Fortunately, the hand of Smithers is outstretched to lead me from the labyrinth.

He does not go at his point with a jump—that is not his way; but he gradually leads one to the edge of the falls, and then—lo! before you are aware of it, you are over.

"When I heard you talking with your friend, I was quite taken with what you said regarding Tom's wife. Mr. Peters, your faith in womankind is indeed charming. It is a shame to even make an attempt to break it up, but when you have had my experience in the world, you will have learned that things are not always what they seem. I have looked upon a face so angelic that one could fall down and worship it, and yet that same woman had deliberately poisoned three husbands for their insurance money."

"Very true, Mr. Smithers. I know there are such creatures in the world—it is a big world, and contains strange things; but I have always been accustomed to relying upon my judgment in such matters."

"Good enough, Mr. Peters. And in this case your judgment doubtless leads you to believe that a woman with the sweet face possessed by Tom Cartaret's wife could not knowingly do wrong?"

I bow my head in reply, although conscious, at the same time, that my position is weak, for I know lovely creatures have often been a source of trouble to those who love them—beauty serves to increase power in such cases.

"I am not at all surprised at what you say, Mr. Peters, and I can honor your motives; but, as I said before, bitter experience, as years roll on, will give you different ideas. I would it were otherwise; but let it pass. We will return to our mutton. What if the charges contained in that letter were true?"

"I can't admit that."

"You must, for the sake of argument."

"God help poor Tom, then!"

"Aye, God help any man who may have fallen into the clutches of a beautiful adventuress. Such a schemer would stop at nothing in order to accomplish her ends—mark my words, Mr. Peters, I say *nothing*."

Even then I fail to catch his meaning, although I look at him keenly, knowing he is up to something. There is little danger of our being interrupted, for Tom is doubtless busily engaged with his wife above.

"Then, Mr. Smithers, you believe she is guilty as charged in the indictment," touching my pocket where the accusing letter lies.

At this he shakes his head naively, and I see I am dealing with a man who seldom admits a thing out and out.

"Not exactly that, sir. I don't believe in the old Roman plan of burning my ships behind me. A way of retreat is a good thing. All I will say is that, under the circumstances, it looks suspiciously as though there might be some truth in the charge. I chance to know this Gautier."

"The deuce you do!"

"So far as my knowledge of him goes, he is a wealthy and accomplished French gentleman. I do not know that he would stoop to do anyone a foul wrong."

Somehow I feel sorely depressed. This man is beating down my defenses. He is trying to undermine my faith in womankind, inherited from my angel mother. I detest him for it, and am yet sensible of the fact that my experience with the gentler sex has been limited, for as yet I

have never been made the victim of a beautiful coquette's wiles.

"Mr. Smithers, you are speaking with a purpose in view—kindly get around to the point you desire to make."

"I am getting there, my friend—there is no need of haste. When you asked Tom Cartaret to confide in you, his face was full of horror at the thought. He would sooner have died then and there than have trusted even you, his best friend, with the secret he carried."

"And yet, on top of this, you say you do not believe he is guilty!" I stammer.

"Exactly; but mark—he knows who is."

His sinister words have the effect of still further baffling me—I grope again without seeing light.

"Then, what in the world keeps him from telling? It is his father who lies dead there, and every human tie should urge him to have the assassin apprehended. If Tom knows, or even suspects, who did this deed, he must be crazy to keep the secret."

"Not so crazy as you think, Mr. Peters. He has a good reason for silence. I believe you would do just as Tom is doing, under the same distressing circumstances."

Thank you. If I catch your meaning, then, he is trying to screen someone."

"Your penetration is remarkable, Mr. Peters—but, then, you are a lawyer."

I ignore the sly thrust.

"Someone is to benefit by his silence and suffering—it must be one whom he cares for a great deal. Tell me, who is guilty, if not Tom?

"Tom Cartaret's wife!" he replies, solemnly.

CHAPTER VI

ONLY HIS ARM BETWEEN

Well, it is out at last, and I am not so staggered by the intelligence as Smithers evidently expected, for, while he is speaking, a horrible suspicion of his meaning has crept into my brain, thus fortifying me in a measure for the disclosure.

"Do you really mean what you say?" I ask.

"You take it deucedly cool," he replies.

"I am a lawyer, you know; then, again, I do not believe what you say—that is, I am convinced you are on the wrong trail."

He is evidently nettled at my words, and I can see his teeth come together with an ugly snap that means business.

"Mr. Peters, it shall be my business to convince you that what I say is probably the truth."

"I would rather be excused," I mutter, as I dislike the turn events have taken. It was bad enough for Tom to be under suspicion—but that sweet-faced girl-wife—heavens! it gives me a cold shiver to think of it.

"Remember your promise to me, Mr. Peters.

It was to aid me, no matter at what personal sacrifice to your feelings."

"That is true, Smithers."

"Besides, I hope you don't imagine I take any pleasure in such a business—it is a duty I have to perform. If it was some villain of a burglar who had done this deed, I would hunt him down with the keenest satisfaction; but a dainty thing like Tom Cartaret's wife—"

He shrugs his shoulders to complete the sentence, and I understand him fully.

"See here, man, do you mean to tell me that delicate woman could take a knife and thrust it into the heart of an old man like Luther Cartaret? —impossible!"

"Slips of girls have done things worse than that. Women have their share in the criminal history of the world, as well as in its heroic achievements. You remember Zenobia, Cleopatra, Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orleans, Charlotte Corday, who freed France from one despot (Marat) during the Reign of Terror, and that other Charlotte, who poisoned so many. Ah! my dear Peters, dismiss from your mind the absurd thought that a lovely woman can do no evil. In all ways they are the most dangerous. I distrust them. Let us calmly analyze the case, and I will set the points before you as you might if addressing a jury. That indictment may, and may not be,

true—we have no means of proving it one way or another. We do know that Luther Cartaret handed it to his son last night—perhaps read it aloud to him. As a sequence, old Luther lies yonder, murdered."

"Yes; go on," I say, brokenly, yet breathlessly.

"Now, since we have temporarily put Tom out of the case as the guilty one, let us suppose there was an eavesdropper at one of these doors at the time the indictment was read—that Tom's wife heard the charges against her character. She may have entered Luther's little room yonder—the door connecting it with the hall was not locked. Well, she hears those awful charges, and does not come out to indignantly refute them—that looks like guilt. She creeps upstairs to her own room, but does not retire. Seated in her chair, she sits there, brooding over the situation, until her blood is like molten lava. She hates the old man who has dared believe in her guilt. Tom comes up and goes to his room—for, in the German fashion, I understand they have separate, connecting apartments. An hour later, say, she creeps to the door, hears the regular breathing of her husband, and understanding he is asleep, makes her way down-stairs, resolved in her mind to forever still the lips that have dared to speak ill of her to her husband. Are you following me?"

"Yes."

His way of putting the case is fascinating, and I forget that it is all a supposition—that he has really nothing tangible to found his evidence upon. So he continues in the same way, just as though he were describing something he has seen:

"In the hall she comes upon your traps—the light from the open library door reveals them to her. Perhaps she is out of her mind for the time being, but she seizes upon the hunting-knife, draws it from its sheath, and steals forward to avenge the insult offered to her. The old man still sits in his chair—it may be he is asleep or meditating. Before him suddenly appears the vengeful figure, weapon in hand, her eyes blazing with the fury of a woman scorned and burned into a fiend. He would shriek aloud, but his tongue cleaves to the roof of his mouth, and before he can give utterance to a single sound, that terrible blade has passed through his heart—the deed is done, and he dies with the look of horror stamped on his face."

I cover my face with my hands, as if to shut out the sight—his words have made it appear so natural. When I remove them again, Smithers' physiognomy is marked with a grin of pleasure, as though he takes my suggestive action as a compliment.

"She throws the deadly blade from her, and flies from the room; but there is a splash of blood upon the hem of her dress, of which she knows nothing. Smaller things than that have hanged people before to-day, Mr. Peters."

Remembering that spot myself, it seems to give an air of credence to his whole story, and without meaning to believe it, I cannot fail to see how easily it might all have been carried out just as he has put it.

"Now, mark me again, Mr. Peters, I have not said that Tom Cartaret's wife did this foul deed knowingly—she may have been out of her mind at the time, or in a trance."

"But it is not reasonable to believe that a weak thing like Tom's wife could drive a knife with such tremendous power—you saw for yourself that the knife passed completely through his body. I doubt whether you or I could have done such a thing without exerting our utmost power."

"True enough; but there are times when the weakest woman can show astounding strength, almost supernatural, in fact. I have seen a girl who hardly looked strong enough to lift a pail of water, and yet it took the united power of four men to hold her—she was crazy. I remember another instance where a girl, a mere child, almost overcame two big men, who had to use ropes to hold her to her cot—she was in the de-

lirium of hydrophobia. I mention these instances to show you that appearances are deceitful. Under certain conditions, the weakest may develop abnormal strength. We have agreed that if Tom Cartaret's wife did execute this wretched crime, she did it under strong excitement. That would explain many things."

"Well, what do you purpose doing about it—arrest the lady on suspicion?" I ask, being irritated by the calm deliberation with which he has worked the case up.

Perhaps there is something in the possible truth of his statements that serves to raise my temper—at any rate, I feel that he has the best of it all.

"Dear me, no; that is not my way of doing things. Some men, as soon as they get a clue, arrest the party, and then endeavor to force a confession; but I work in another way, preferring to accumulate evidence, and leaving the arrest until I am dead sure of being right."

"For that, at least, I can admire you, Smithers. You are a genuine detective—those you refer to, nothing but police spies. I know them well, as I have run across them in my practice. Such fellows are always ready to share with thieves the spoils they secure, and guarantee them immunity from arrest. What is your plan, may I ask, if it be not too pertinent a question?"

"Mr. Peters, I already realize that I am to have a very disagreeable task in this house; but duty is duty with me, and I shall not shrink from doing what I believe to be right."

"I can honor that resolution, sir. You are bound to carry out the orders of your chief."

"I was sent here to solve yonder mystery, and if mortal man can do it, I shall. You are not bound to do anything beyond a certain point, and if it jars upon your feelings, say so, and step out."

"I am deeply interested—you knew I would be, Mr. Smithers. Although I cannot do anything to assist you in your effort to fasten the guilt upon either Tom or his wife, I shall not betray your plans to a living soul. Besides, I may be of service to you."

"It is a bargain, then, Mr. Peters."

He insists upon shaking hands with me, although I feel as though I would just as soon take hold of a snake or a toad, as his cold digits; but he means well, and I am willing to give him all the credit for it, so I accept his hand, and gravely shake it.

"I shall probably remain about the house during the morning at least. The coroner will come at some time, but I will have the inquest postponed as long as possible. It always interferes with detective work, for witnesses are bullied

into admitting absurd things, and the guilty parties take warning."

This gives a breathing-spell at least. I have been dreading that hurried inquest, and the rough manner in which the family secrets may be dragged out for the gaze of the scoffing public.

There is a skeleton in every closet, and no doubt the Cartaret closet is no exception. To outsiders, it may be very interesting and amusing, but how humiliating to those concerned, when the family secrets are bandied about by every idle fellow who chances to overhear the evidence. My sympathy goes out toward an afflicted family like the Cartarets; but fortune has decreed that they shall suffer, and apparently no human hand can ward off the blow.

"I will leave you for a time Mr. Peters, but I will be somewhere near. It is my privilege to do as I please in this matter, and I have my way of gaining new evidence. If you discover anything of importance, and choose to let me hear it, I shall be obliged. One thing let me warn you against: in talking with Tom Cartaret, be careful how you approach the subject of his wife—he may take the alarm, and endeavor to entirely blot out the trail. I believe such a man as our friend would do anything to save the one he loved."

At the time, Smithers' last words sound odd to

me, and in the near future they come back to my mind with added significance. Yes, a man like Tom Cartaret would do much to screen the woman he loves and calls wife. I have seen him risk his life for a friend taken with a cramp while swimming in Long Island Sound, off New Haven—that friend was no other than myself. I have known him to run into a blazing house and save a child belonging to a poor Irish woman, barely escaping with his life.

This is the man whose strong arm is the only barrier standing between Madge and the terror of the law. What can he do when Mr. Smithers has finished his case, and invokes the majesty of the law to his aid?

The detective has left me—I fail to note whither he has gone, but find myself alone, and my reflections are bitter indeed. It seems as though a malign fate has sent me here to witness and perhaps be an unwilling participant in the downfall of Tom Cartaret's happiness, and mentally I groan at the unpleasant prospect ahead.

CHAPTER VII

UNCLE JETHRO TALKS

For a short time I stand there at the library window, lost in reflection. Turn whichever way I would, the prospect seems to be just as uninviting, and I can see no loop-hole of escape—Tom must pass through the bitter furnace, and I can only hope that he will come out again purified as by fire.

Although my faith in womankind is so high, I must confess the logic of the detective has somewhat staggered me.

It does look black for Tom's wife—here are two terrible accusations against her, either one or both of which may be true.

Will she, too, come from the furnace as fine gold, purified by the flames? Heaven grant it. If, on the other hand, the reasoning of Smithers should prove only too true, I am almost afraid for Tom Cartaret's reason—he is so completely wrapped up in this girl-wife of his, that to find her guilty of such a crime would be a terrible shock.

He married her abroad—she must be a for-

eigner. I cannot even guess to what nation she belongs, for her English, so far as I have heard it, is as perfect as can be. Perhaps she is a native of some country like Corsica, where the terrible vendetta flourishes, and weak girls, as well as strong men, are taught to avenge wrongs with the dagger.

If this should prove to be the case, I can readily understand how she could thus punish old Luther Cartaret for daring to accuse her of such terrible things to her husband.

These thoughts flit through my mind with a rapidity equal to lightning, and give me much worry.

The fresh air that comes in at the open window is so pleasant that I am impelled to put my head out, and thus discover that it is really but a few feet to the ground. Tempted by this fact, I finally give a jump, and find myself in the grounds.

Here I can walk about, and feel better than when shut up in the room with that terrible figure stiffened in his chair. The blue sky above, with the sun dispelling the frost in the air, makes it a morning fit for the gods. Who could not enjoy such an atmosphere?

Remembering a suggestion that had come to me while talking with the detective, I very naturally examine the spot underneath the window

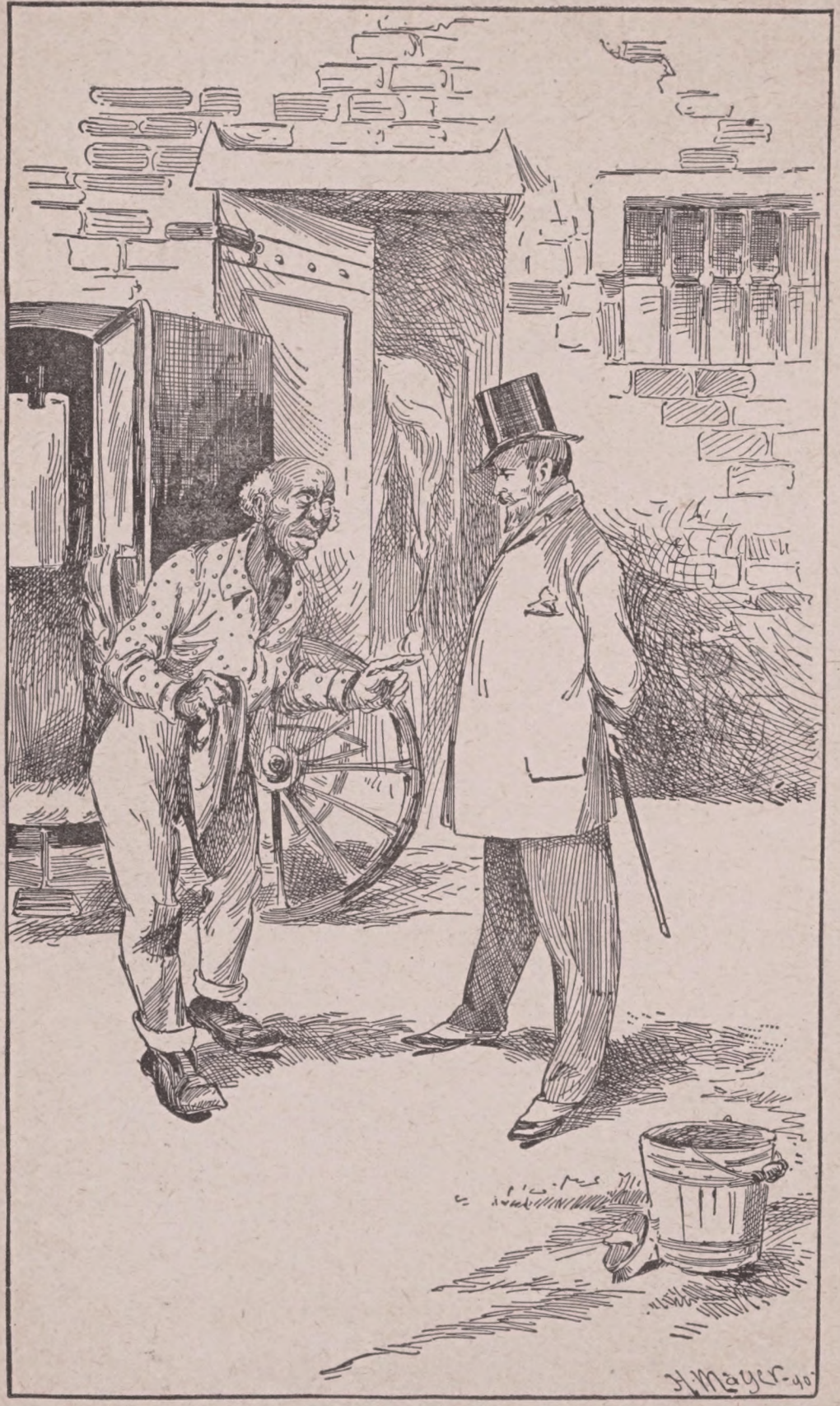
to see if anyone has been there recently, but the grass baffles me, and I admit that a lawyer is not a detective. Eyes more keen than mine might discover the evidence I seek, but I fail to find it.

After that I walk on, and my thoughts begin to take another range. The fresh air does me good, and I no longer manage to only see the gloomy side of things, as when shut up in the library with that grim figure that awaits the coming of the coroner.

So I wander around for some little time, enjoying the prospect. Luther Cartaret has a fine old place here in the suburbs of the city, and being possessed of means, he has beautified it in a manner that charms the eye. The grand forest trees have been permitted to remain in many places, so that it seems to me like some English park, and this view is considerably heightened by the appearance of deer in a wire inclosure near by, the wire being invisible a short distance away.

While thus wandering about, and lamenting the fact that such a black shadow has fallen upon the life of the young man to whom this noble property belongs, I find myself in the vicinity of the stables.

The path I am traversing leads directly there, and I conclude to follow it to its legitimate end,



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not doubting but that I can readily reach the house again from that point. Someone is at work near by, and presently I see the old darky, Uncle Jethro. He seems unconscious of my presence until I speak, and then gives a tremendous start, looking dreadfully alarmed. It is easy to see that Uncle Jethro has been greatly broken up by the terrible event that has taken place here within the last few hours.

"You skeer de ole man, sah! My thoughts was fixed on de pore marse, an' when you speak, I 'clar to goodness I done thought 'twar him."

I have seen enough of the old darky to know him as an original character, and somehow the thought comes to me to speak with him about the tragedy. Here is a field the detective has not worked as yet—it does not look profitable; but, then, one cannot always tell what may be the result when fishing in strange waters.

"Uncle, this is a sad thing for the house of Cartaret," I remark, in a sympathetic tone.

"It am, dat are a fact, sah," says Jethro, rubbing at the carriage with a piece of chamois-skin.

"You've been with Luther Cartaret a long time?"

"We was boys togedder, down on de ole Virginny plantation. When Marse Luther leab de ole home he took me wid him, and set me free. I'se done clung to him ebber since."

"He was married at that time?"

"Yes, sah."

"And his wife died soon after Tom was born?"

"Dat am a fact—she was nebber strong."

"I believe Mr. Cartaret married again?"

Uncle Jethro gives signs of uneasiness. I cannot influence him to look at me, but he continues his work while he replies:

"Yes, sah."

"When did his second wife die?"

"You'se is a friend ob de fambly, Marse Peters?"

"Tom's dearest friend," I reply.

"Den I don't mind tellin' you what we wouldn't like ebbery one to know. De second lady she wasn't nothin' like de ekal ob Marse Luther. She hab a quarrel wid him afore two years, an' run away wid another man."

"Jupiter! that was tough, Jethro. Do you know what ever became of this second wife?"

He ceases his work a moment to look in the direction of the house, just seen through the trees, and then answers slowly, like a man weighing well every word he utters:

"We larned arterwards dat she throwed herself into de ribber when she quarrel wid de man she run away wid. Marse Luther nebber allow her name to be spoken in de house arter she runned

away;" and he again sets to work polishing the carriage wheel.

There is something about the old man's manner that vaguely suggests deceit. I do not know why he should act in that way toward me, but it may be he is suspicious of everyone, knowing a detective has come on the scene.

"What was this second wife's name, uncle?" I ask, meaning to work him around to the tragedy presently.

"Rachel, sah," he replies, in a low tone, and with a half-scared look around him, as though expecting the ghost of old Luther to suddenly appear and punish him for daring to mention that name aloud.

"Uncle, on the way here you told me the old gentleman had come to a violent death, and that it was either a suicide or a murder?"

"Yes, sah, I did," solemnly.

"Didn't you know then that it could not possibly be a case of suicide—that some other hand than his own must have taken the life of Luther Cartaret?"

As my eyes fall upon the darky's face when it is turned toward me, I see that he looks stubborn and set in his way. Uncle Jethro can keep a secret as well as anyone, if it is ever intrusted to his care.

"In spite ob de facts, Marse Peters, I sticks to

de susancide theory. It am better for ebberyone concerned, an' kaint do de ole massa no harm as I knows on," he says, doggedly.

It strikes me instantly that he is endeavoring to shield someone. Can it be possible he knows or suspects the truth? What other meaning can I impute to his words? The thought comes to me with force, and somehow an uneasy feeling creeps over me. If Jethro knows that either Tom Cartaret or his wife committed the murder, he cannot hope to conceal the fact long—at the inquest the truth will be wrung from his lips, and even if he manages to elude them here by a sullen denial of all knowledge, the cunning detective must soon bring him to terms.

Perhaps I can influence him myself, though I hardly know why I should, save for my own satisfaction, as I could not turn any knowledge gained from this source over to Smithers, if it went against my friend.

"Where do you sleep, uncle?" I ask.

He gives me another of those quick looks, and nods toward the stable.

"I has a room in dar, Marse Peters."

"Generally a sound sleeper?"

"I am dat."

"How about last night?"

"Didn't rest 'ticularly well."

"Was it rather cold when you were out, uncle, after midnight?" I ask, quietly.

"Well, it was dat—how de debble you know?—who done tole you?—I don't know nuffin about it. 'Spect it was cold, though—frost dis mawnin'."

Uncle Jethro has given himself away readily—falls into my little pitfall with the greatest of ease. What chance would he have against such an accomplished schemer as the dark-faced man sent to investigate this thing?

I am now positive of one thing: the darky knows enough to explain the mystery if he can be influenced to talk—if he does not exactly know, he suspects the truth. He was out in the grounds during the night—perhaps at the house itself. Could it be possible he has had a share in this strange crime? Nonsense! I might as well put that notion forever out of my head. The only share he has had in it is to endeavor to shield the guilty party by his silence.

My thoughts go to the still form in the library that seems to call aloud for vengeance. If the trail only ran in some other direction, how hot I would be upon it; but under the peculiar circumstances, I have little heart to pursue the scent, conscious that it constantly draws me nearer an unpleasant reality.

The words and manner of the old ex-slave give away that which he would hide—the fact that he

knows something. Judging from his disposition, however, I am confident that thumb-screws will not cause him to openly confess while he believes he is serving his master by silence. The rack would have no terrors for this faithful servant.

There are other ways, however, in which the same end may be accomplished.

"What took you out in the night, uncle?" I ask, steadily holding his eye, for I have a theory that by watching the human orb I can detect instantly when anyone prevaricates. The eye is the light of the soul, and expresses every feeling that moves the inward man.

"Well, you see, Marse Peters, one ob de hosses war oneasy—sometime ago he got his foot cotched in a bar at de side ob his stall, and we hab a bad time. I tink dis happen agin, so I frow on some clothes and run down-stairs to de stalls. Nuffin' war de matter, howebber, an' I was jest about to go to my room agin, when I suddenly remembered dat I done leab a lap-robe out on de grass, an' so I go out to bring it in—dar it is in de sun yonder. Dat de way I happened to be out in de grounds in de night."

"Uncle, your evidence might be of value to the coroner's jury, because you were the only one about the house stirring at that time. It was bright starlight—no, the moon was up still, perhaps?"

He nods his head.

"Yes, sah, de moon was jest ober in de west."

"And, uncle—remember, a terrible crime has been done here, and you may help unravel the mystery—did you see anyone about the grounds at the time you were out?"

"I hab reason to beliebe I did, Marse Peters," he replies, a look of satisfaction on his wrinkled face.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DOOR IN THE STONE WALL

The reply is unexpected. Watching the old negro all the time, I have felt positive that, while speaking about the horse and the lap-robe, he is deliberately lying to me—his eyes tell me that much. When, however, he declares his belief that he did see someone in the grounds on the preceding night, I cannot discover the same expression, and am ready to even believe he speaks the truth.

That may mean a great deal, and I catch my breath before questioning further.

"Now, uncle, how about this party you believe you saw in these grounds?—tell me all," I finally ask.

Uncle Jethro ceases his work upon the wheel, surveys it a moment, and then says:

"Marse Peters, I was jest about to pick up de lap-robe, which lay right dar, wen I seed a figger ober yonder, between de house an' de stable. It seemed as dough de pusson war a tryin' to hide hisself in de shadows."

"It was a man, then?" I put in, encouragingly; at which the old negro looks a little uneasy.

"Why, Marse Peters, you don't 'spect de ladies be wanderin' through de grounds at one o'clock in de mawnin', does yer?" he demands.

"It was one o'clock, then?" I pursue.

"About dat time, sah. Yes, it war a man—I seed him as he passed from de shadow ob de trees to dat ob de house. My curiosity war excited, as I didn't know why anyone hab de right to come in hyar at dat time, dough de marse he let de place be open in de day to all. De fust ting I done war to run back to de stable an' get my gun—it am an ole army musket dat I used to hunt wid down in Virginny, an' around hyar wen game was plenty. Wid dat I feel able to meet any man, an' so I make de rounds ob de house, but I seed nobody, an' finally 'cluded dat, whoebber it war, he must hab gone away agin; so I return to de stable and go to sleep like an honest man what hab no one to fear, an' de next ting I knowed, dat Chloe come an' called to me, tellin' me de awful facks."

"Uncle, you say you went around the house?"

"Dat I did," he stoutly insists.

"Then you passed the library?"

He anticipates my next question.

"I seed de light dar, an' knowed de ole marse must be readin' in de library. Den I made up my min' dat probably it war him as I had seed in de grounds. Marse Luther hab dat habit

sometimes ob lookin' at de stars. He somethin' ob a writer—a poet, dey cail um."

"That eased your mind, uncle?"

"Yes, sah. When I think dat way, I declar ole unc' a fool, an' go back to my bed."

This is not an unlikely story—it may even be true; but I believe the negro has not told all he knows, by a good deal. At the same time, I hardly know how to handle him, lawyer though I am, without exciting his alarm.

From his self-satisfied manner, it is evident to me that he believes himself secure in what he has said, and I do not want to disturb that feeling of equanimity.

"Tell me just where you saw this figure."

He points out the exact place, and describes the actions of the party, of whom he had a hasty glimpse in the misty moonlight. This he does with so much exactness that I am constrained to believe he speaks the truth.

"If Luther Cartaret came out to walk in the night air, which door would he probably use?" I ask, with an idea in view.

"De little side door—he allers did."

"Do you know whether that was locked this morning, uncle?"

"I don't beliebe it was, sah. As I ran to de house arter old Chloe done scart me outen a year's growth, I seed dat identical door partly

open, an' yet it war out ob my way, so I go in de back door."

Here is another point gained. I treasure these things, because they are apt to come in handy at some time in the near future, when the several links of the chain are united.

"Uncle, someone killed your old master, in spite of your suicide theory, and it is our duty to find out who it was. On this account, I want to discover who was in these grounds last night, and you must help me."

"Dat I will, Marse Peters," he returns, with sudden animation that surprises me. "If it war dat sneakin' critter what done took de marse's life, I hope to see him hanged for it."

Leaving the darky working away at his carriage, I saunter toward the spot where he has directed me, and where he saw the figure of the man vanish.

It is still early in the morning, and the sun feels very pleasant, when one has experienced the frosty air of the early dawn. I am an enthusiastic lover of nature, and in my mind the autumn is the best time in the whole year. When the rich tints are on the trees, life seems filled with new ambitions, and one inhales the glorious atmosphere with the keenest relish. That is the time I love to be in the country—the sea-shore satisfies me in summer.

I am not long in reaching the place where I have been directed. Somehow the sudden hope has arisen in my breast that, after all, it may be an outside party who is responsible for the death in the Cartaret family. Old Jethro seems to have suddenly had his mind set that way, and I indulge in a few speculations concerning the matter myself.

It is always possible—the dead man may have had enemies outside; few men of wealth but who have at some time, in their active money-grubbing, made bitter foes.

When I finally bend my head and make use of my eyes, looking for signs of the man who must have passed over this place if what old Jethro has said is true, I feel a satisfaction upon discovering the imprint of a shoe upon the soft earth of the flower-bed.

Instantly I draw closer, and proceed to examine it. Luther Cartaret is a large man—his foot never made that imprint. I settle this in the start, and there is another reason why I should decide that the owner of Maplehurst could not have been the party whom Uncle Jethro saw—he would keep upon the gravel walks; this person went over flower-beds in a reckless fashion.

My interest in the case deepens. Eagerly I follow the trail, careful not to mar it with my

own footsteps, lest it may be desirable for anyone to go over the ground again.

To my mind, the way in which these footsteps trend makes it look as though the party were fleeing from the house; the assassin, terrified at what he has done, might have thus dashed away, pursued by the fiends of remorse. I catch at this slight hope as a drowning man might at a straw. Who knows what this new clue may not develop? I can put Smithers upon it at the first favorable opportunity, with the greatest of pleasure, because it will divert his mind from other things.

The stronger the evidence becomes against an outside party, the more I will be pleased. Soon I lose the track—a grass-plot has been reached where the footprints fail to show. I notice the general direction taken by the person thus fleeing from the house, and continue on my way, sauntering along as though just out enjoying the crisp November air.

My judgment is good, for once more I run across the footprints where they strike another soft piece of earth. The direction is exactly the same as before—the person walking away undoubtedly knows whither he goes.

Again I lose the tracks, nor do I come across them again; but the wall at the end of the park is near by, and keeping on in a direct line, I

soon reach it. My attention is directed toward a heavy door in the wall. This may be fastened at times, but it certainly is not now, and governed by curiosity, I open it and look beyond.

To my surprise, it opens into quite a large cemetery—there is such a one at Clifton, and many burials from the great metropolis occur there every day.

From the point where I stand the scene is quite impressive, for the ground rises a little, and hundreds of white and gray tombstones can be seen as the eye ranges around.

Undoubtedly, the unknown party left the grounds by means of this door in the wall, which very probably had been the means of his ingress also. I wonder whether this mysterious person carried away the secret of Luther Cartaret's death, or if that secret is still to be solved under the roof of the desolated manse.

How can the identity of the party be discovered? Would Smithers be of any help here? I feel that I ought to put him on the track at any rate, and am burning with the desire to lead the man away—anywhere, so that he has his zeal directed in another quarter than Tom Cartaret's wife.

Thus making up my mind, I turn my steps in the direction of the house, from which I have now been absent some time. If Tom has come down

to the library again, he will be puzzled to account for my absence.

As I approach the house, I find myself closer to the little side door than any other, and the notion strikes me to enter there. I can thus satisfy my mind with regard to certain things connected with the case.

Just as I lay my hand upon the door-knob, it is turned from the other side, the door opens, and I find myself face to face with—Smithers.

He smiles.

"Ah! enjoying a stroll about the grounds, eh, friend Peters, while I roam about the house? It is a pleasant morning for a ramble. I don't suppose you have picked up any startling news. I saw you engaged with old uncle as I looked from an upper window," he remarks.

Thereupon I give him to understand that although the news I have gleaned is by no means startling, I have thought it best that he should hear it.

"With pleasure, my dear fellow. Come, there is a seat in yonder arbor; we will not be molested; the air is delicious, and I shall be delighted to listen to you."

When we are seated there, I briefly narrate my discovery, saying nothing about my conviction that Uncle Jethro tried to conceal his true knowledge or suspicions.

Mr. Smithers is deeply interested in all I say. Nevertheless, I realize that his former theory is not affected in the least. He has too many points of evidence leading toward Tom Cartaret's wife, to let them drop easily.

He admits that it is something that will bear analysis, and declares he will keep it in his calculations; but his manner does not go to reassure me that he will abate his vigilance in other quarters one iota, in order to look up this new evidence.

I fear he has, in ransacking the house, found new evidence against one of the inmates—indeed, his manner tells me so, and I wonder whether he will confide it to my keeping. There is nothing in our agreement stipulating this, but he may choose to let me know what he has done.

"On your part, Mr. Smithers, how does the case go?" I ask, finally.

"It grows blacker every hour for Tom Cartaret's wife," he replies.

CHAPTER IX

"I ALONE AM THE CRIME-STAINED WRETCH!"

His answer depresses me, and I am certain now that Smithers must have found out certain new features in the game. He sits there looking grave enough, but I can imagine his detective soul gloating over the success he has attained.

"Then, you have discovered more connected with the case?" I say, faintly.

"Yes; while you turned your attention to old uncle, I assailed a more profitable source—the other black wing of the house—Aunty Chloe."

I doubt the truth of his assertion regarding it being the more profitable source, believing that Jethro, if willing to speak, could do much toward clearing up this mystery—perhaps he was looking in at the library window and witnessed the tragedy.

"What could she tell you of the murder?" I ask, when my surprise subsides.

"Nothing, because she knows nothing; but she let fall a point under my cross-examination that has a direct bearing on the case."

"Unconsciously?"

"Dear me, yes. Good old soul, she would rather cut her tongue off than say a word that she thought would injure Tom's wife, whom she seems to love almost as dearly as she does the young 'marse.'"

"What was the point in question?"

"Just this: Chloe has a room situated at the top of the back stairs, and she always leaves her door open. Last night, she says she was awakened by some strange sound—she can't say what it was like—but, startled, she got up and went to the window. The moon was still shining outside, but she saw nothing to alarm her, and was just turning back to bed when a movement in the hall attracted her attention, and she boldly went to the door. To her astonishment, she saw a female form at the window in the hall looking toward the west—a figure dressed in white, and upon whom the moonlight fell, so that she had no difficulty in recognizing —Madge Cartaret!"

I give a groan at his words, for it seems to me that they drive another nail in the coffin that holds all of poor Tom's happiness.

"She stood there a moment, and then, turning, went into her room. Aunt Chloe wondered at her being dressed at this hour. She concluded that the lady must have gone to sleep, seated in a chair, and, aroused by the same unknown sound

that awakened her, had run to the hall window to look out. I was careful not to arouse her suspicions, and she doesn't seem shrewd enough to put two and two together. Privately, then, my opinion is to this effect: the sound that aroused the old negress was either the death-cry of Luther Cartaret, or a shriek of joy from the person who, in a fit of crazed passion, sent your hunting-knife through his heart. Everything points to Tom Cartaret's wife as the guilty one, and if the evidence accumulates at this rate, much against my will I shall eventually be compelled to cause her arrest."

I bend my head forward on my hands. At the same time, something like a groan reaches my ears—it cannot come from Smithers, who evidently believes it is myself from whom it emanates; but just at this moment I am feeling too miserable to investigate.

"You will be in no hurry about this thing, I hope, Mr. Smithers?" I say at last.

If the dreadful blow must fall, I would keep it off as long as possible, in the hope that something may turn up; that is human nature always.

"I am in no hurry. The lady is not apt to escape us, and can be found when needed. I shall let the matter simmer," is the expressive way in which he puts it, and I draw a real breath of relief, for this will give me time to do a little

work of my own, in the hope of ameliorating the melancholy condition in which Tom's wife has been placed by what seems to me a miserable chain of circumstances. You see the charm of her sweet face is still upon me—I cannot as yet imagine her guilty of such a heinous crime, and until the proof is piled up against her, will continue to hope it is all a grievous mistake.

Mr. Smithers does not choose to tell me any more, even if he knows anything beyond what he has imparted to me, and presently I find myself alone in the arbor.

The evidence placed before me has in a measure stunned me, and I sit there for a few minutes to recover my scattered forces, before going in to face Tom. How can I look him in the eye when such thoughts are in my mind? Having in a measure subdued my feelings, I at length rise to leave the arbor. Upon emerging from the place, greatly to my astonishment, I see someone hurrying toward the house, and recognize Tom.

A suspicion darts into my mind that gives me quite a shock. Can it be possible he has in some way overheard the plain accusation of the detective? He is a man above listening to a conversation between others, but by some chance he may have heard mention made of his wife when Smithers first declared that the clouds were growing black indeed for her. This would in itself be

enough to make him listen, and what he heard the detective say was sure to turn his blood almost cold with horror.

Poor Tom! How my heart goes out to him in the great throbs of friendship! I would like to let him understand how keenly I sympathize with him, but he knows that already, and I do not see how I can offer him a grain of hope, with the knowledge I possess.

The best I can do, then, is to leave him alone. I even contemplate making a visit to the city in order to see this Gautier, and having it out with the man, but conclude to wait a while.

So I once more enter the house. Tom I must see again, and if he knows all, I cannot help it. Through no fault of mine has this come about—I have done what I could to lead the pursuit in another channel.

In the hall I meet him. His face looks worse than before, and shows concentrated suffering, such as I have seldom seen upon the human countenance. Wearily he motions for me to go into the parlor, which is across from the dining-room, and understanding that Tom has something to say to me, I obey.

What is he about to do—admit his knowledge of his wife's guilt, and then plead with me to help him save her from ignominy and shame? I can do a good deal for Tom, and even in this I

may be able to help him; but it is a delicate task, and I somehow shrink from it.

Nevertheless, I go into the drawing-room, and drop back in the embrace of an easy-chair that offers support.

Tom cannot sit down; he seems too restless, and looking at the man, I feel that he has nerved himself for a trying ordeal. Something is on his mind—anyone can read that—and he has reached a point beyond which he finds it impossible to go.

Thus, walking up and down, he directs his words to me, and I feel their burning force:

"John! heaven grant, my dear boy, that you may never experience the bitterness of soul anguish that is upon me now. There is nothing that can help me, and it were better that I lie beside my poor father, in yonder library, than live to see our name trampled in the dust of a murder trial in court."

He takes a few more paces before continuing:

"Unintentionally, John, I overheard a certain communication between that man and yourself. The shock it gave me nearly killed me. Can it be possible that you believe Madge guilty of such a terrible crime as that?"

"I do not. I have declared her innocent, but he, the man-shark, thinks her guilty, and he will

not let grass grow under his feet until he has accomplished his purpose."

"He shall not harm her; not if I have to—kill him first. The man who lays a hand on her must do so over my body. She is my wife!"

It is indescribable, the way he says this. His head is elevated proudly, and just then I seem to feel that to be Tom Cartaret's wife is better than to be a queen.

"Ah! poor Tom; your arm would defend her, but what could you do against the law?" I say, in pity for his despair.

Then he turns upon me almost savagely.

"I could die for her," he mutters, brokenly, "my poor, misjudged Madge. Suppose she did do this awful thing, it was while not in her senses, and because she believed it would aid me. But what am I saying! she is innocent!—of course she is innocent!" he almost raves in his despair; and the more he repeats these words, the deeper grows my conviction that he does not believe them.

I wonder what scheme he has in his head now, with a view toward saving Madge—a desperate one, to be sure. Can he be losing his mind over the great trouble that has fallen upon him? I have noticed a crafty gleam in his eyes once or twice that gives me alarm.

Good heavens! if Tom goes crazy, who can

tell what mad freak he may indulge in, even to putting the prying detective out of the way, so that the truth may not be known. That would be madness personified. I begin to fear him a little, and wish this thing were settled one way or another. What was the good of delay, anyhow? I had desired it before, when talking with the detective, but my ideas have undergone a change. If Tom's wife is guilty, the truth must come out sooner or later anyway; while, should she be innocent, it is an outrage to suspect her.

"Tom, I beg you to calm yourself. God knows I believe in your wife's innocence, and I am ready to work night and day to prove it. If the worst should come, I am sure we will be able to discover that she did this dreadful thing while in a trance of some sort."

He hardly seems to hear me, but striding up and down quickly, his head bent upon his breast, is lost in thought.

It is not hard for me to imagine the channel in which his mind runs. He sees his disgraced and desolated home—his beloved wife torn from his arms, and thrust into a felon's cell—the whole story held up to public inspection in court and in the daily papers.

No wonder he grinds his teeth. He is doubtless thinking of how Philip Gautier will be brought up as a witness, and swear to a pack of lies in

"CAN IT BE POSSIBLE HE HAS OVERHEARD OUR CONVERSATION."—Page 84.

connection with Tom Cartaret's wife, the woman who once refused his love.

In Tom's place, I believe my brain must have snapped under the strain, and I do not wonder he shows such wretchedness in his face.

Suddenly ceasing his nervous walk, he comes to a stand in front of me, and, bending down, says, in a voice strangely calm:

"John Peters, will you carry a message to that man for me?"

"You mean the detective?"

"I do."

"Let me have the message," I say, expecting some defiant outbreak.

"Tell him," he continues, in that awful voice, a stage-whisper, "that my wife is innocent of that crime. When he wants the guilty party, let him arrest the one who in anger had cause to strike a blow in defense of his wife's honor. I, Tom Cartaret, and I alone, am the crime-stained wretch he seeks!" and without another word, he turns and leaves the room, while I sit and glare after him in breathless astonishment.

CHAPTER X

RIVALS

"That is a lie!" says a quiet voice close to my elbow, and turning quickly, I behold the omnipresent Smithers.

I have not dreamed of his presence—indeed, for the time, the man has quite slipped my mind until I am thus harshly reminded that there is such a being in the world.

The words of Tom Cartaret have fallen on my ears with stunning force, and leave me in a very peculiar condition of mind. If Tom chooses to confess his guilt, of course that ends the matter—so it would seem, at any rate.

The detective has been concealed behind a sofa during the interview. Whether he was in the room when we entered, or crept to his hiding-place while we talked, I do not know, for I believe him capable of anything; but the former is, in all probability, the truth.

He advances toward me with a grin upon his dark face, seats himself just in front, and then nods his head knowingly.

"I repeat what I said, Mr. Peters—that is a lie!"

"I half believe you are right myself, sir; but what object—"

"Object? Why, Mr. Peters, that man loves his wife—he is ready to sacrifice himself in order to save her. That is all."

I see it plainly now.

Noble Tom! well worthy of one's friendship—I feel proud of him. There come to my memory words that fell from his lips—he had said he could die for her, and now he is about to put it into deeds.

A rush of emotion sweeps over me, and I feel that, no matter at what cost, he must be saved—that it would be madness to allow him to carry out such a scheme as this.

"You have no idea of taking him at his word, then, and arresting him?" I ask.

"Not at all. If a rascal on the street should come up to me and declare himself guilty of this crime, I might lock him up until I could investigate, but without dreaming that he could be guilty. As for Mr. Cartaret—well, I am here on the spot, and working this case, and I can see through a millstone that has a hole in it."

I breathe easier after he has spoken.

"Have Tom's actions weakened or strengthened the case against his wife?" I pursue.

"The latter is the fact. We know now that even her husband has suspected her from the

start. He must have seen her come into her room on that night, thought little or nothing about it at the time, but when the awful truth came in the morning, he was able to associate the two."

"No wonder his face was ashy pale! To lose a father and a wife in one night is enough to pull the stoutest man down."

"I reckon it is. I, too, feel deuced sorry for the young man, but duty is iron-bound with me, and must not be trifled with. From present appearances, the case is hard against her."

"Nothing can be done to help her?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Do you know, Mr. Smithers, I had a strange thought bearing on the matter."

"I should be pleased to hear it. You lawyers are notorious for striking pay-dirt when everyone else has abandoned the claim."

Mr. Smithers is disposed to be something of a flatterer—I can easily see he is in a good humor, because his case is working so well. That is, above all other things, his especial pride, and everything else must give way before it.

"Could it be possible that Tom Cartaret's wife has done this deed, and is unconscious of it?"

He eyes me in a peculiar way, playing nervously with his watch-chain the while, and it is a full minute before he thinks to reply. During

that time there is no telling what a legion of odd thoughts may have gone flashing through that wonderful brain of his.

"Jove! Mr. Peters, it is just as I suspected—you have gone and struck pay-dirt at once."

"Then, you think there is a remote possibility of such a thing being true?" I ask, eagerly.

Could I prove this, it must relieve Tom of a certain amount of his load, though it would still be heavy enough, heaven knows.

"Such a thing is possible, but not probable."

I have a new hope, however.

"Mr. Peters, tell me, what put this strange idea into your head?" he continues.

"When she came into the library, while I was talking with Tom, the look on her face, and her startled exclamation, told me that one of two things was the case. Some terrible consciousness had burst upon her like an electric flash. She suddenly realized that she must herself be responsible for that crime, or believed, in the flash of the moment, that Tom's quarrel with his father had been followed by his taking the old man's life."

"Mr. Peters, you read faces well, and I am inclined to give you the benefit of the doubt. How could she be ignorant of having done such a deed until the sight of the body suddenly forced conviction to her soul?"

I am quite prepared to meet his question—it does not stagger me in the least.

"Suppose the woman is addicted to strange freaks of somnambulism—is it not possible she could do such a thing in her sleep?"

"Possible—yes, anything is possible—but hardly probable," he replies, smiling forlornly, as though he does not imagine my theory will hold together. I realize myself how weak it is, but that does not prevent me from clinging to it desperately, as a last chance.

"I mean to find out from Tom, at the first opportunity, whether he knows anything about his wife's habits—if she is a sleep-walker, surely he ought to know it."

"Success to you."

"How about the other side? If she is innocent, or totally unconscious of her guilt, having committed the deed in a fit, then she undoubtedly believes Tom the guilty party."

"Granted," says Smithers, nonchalantly, as though the matter were hardly worth attention.

I am surprised at his manner, but, then, he is not interested, like myself, in proving the innocence of Tom's wife. The case to him at present is beautifully rounded out, and while he holds the reins and drives, it matters little to him, professionally, who is hurt.

We rise to leave the room.

"By the way, I sent a message to the city—to the man Gautier," he says, suddenly.

At this I start.

"What did you say to him?"

"I told him of the crime that had been committed here, and that I trusted he would not leave the city, as he might be needed as a witness against Tom Cartaret's wife."

Somehow his words give me a cold chill. I can feel the folds of the great anaconda tightening—escape for her seems impossible.

"I suppose that is a part of your business, Mr. Smithers; but I, for one, would hate to be in a profession which necessitated my proving a delicate lady like this one guilty of murder."

"She is no more to be pitied than a shop-girl," he declares, with sudden energy, revealing to me the fact that, deep down in his heart, he is something of a socialist, detesting the upper classes.

"That is quite true. Crime should be punished as severely among the rich as among the poor—in fact, I believe the punishment should be heavier, for they do not have the temptations that come to those who struggle for their daily bread. I did not mean because she was a lady, but that it was a helpless woman you were running to earth. Nor am I blaming you, Mr. Smithers, for, as I said before, duty is duty, no matter if it does seem unpleasant at times."

"You are a sensible man, Mr. Peters."

"I thank heaven that I do not have to hound women to their death, at least. How did you send your message to Gautier?"

"By mail; the butcher said he was going by the town post-office, and would mail it."

"Mr. Smithers, do you know what I am sorely tempted to do?"

"What is it?" languidly.

"To open up an opposition detective bureau to yours—to endeavor to prove this lady's innocence while you try to declare her guilty."

He looks at me in surprise.

"Either you are out of your mind, Mr. Peters, or else you have struck a promising clue," he says.

At that I give a low laugh.

"You think I am bold. Possibly so, but you forget it is my natural forte to defend people; I have never played the prosecutor yet. Do you accept the challenge?"

"Just as you say; but I warn you, my dear fellow, that you have undertaken a task that Hercules might have shrunk from. The evidence is overwhelming, I might say."

"There may be a loop-hole where I can get a foothold," I reply, quietly.

It pleases me to see him look uneasy. I experience a sort of fierce satisfaction in thus

touching up his nerves, not that I have much hope of success, but the situation is desperate, and requires a like remedy.

"Well, good luck to you, Mr. Peters. I can admire your motives, if not your ambition. We may yet have a little engagement in the arena. Remember, I shall show you no mercy."

"And I ask none," I reply.

When I find myself alone, my thoughts go out to the man in New York—Gautier.

Can I not, in some way, cause him to leave the city before he receives the letter written by the detective? My mind is made up—I will pay him a visit.

Running across old Jethro in the grounds, I ask him a few questions, and learn that in ten minutes or so a stage will pass the place, bound for Clifton, and that if I am outside, I can secure a ride to the depot, where a train for New York will not be long in arriving. So I bid the old man tell Tom I have gone to the city on some business I have neglected, but that I will take the earliest train back. Luckily, Mr. Smithers does not see me—he might suspect the truth, and in some way contrive to thwart my plans.

I have given the darky instructions not to let the detective know where I have gone, and as Uncle Jethro fears and dislikes the man, he is not apt to deceive me.

Hardly have I reached the road before I see a cloud of dust approaching, and the stage appears. At my signal it stops, and I find room inside.

Reaching Clifton, I learn I have half an hour to spare, and loiter about the station.

A number of shops are opposite, and the post-office near by. A butcher's wagon is drawn up at the curb, and I recognize the driver as one I have seen before—he must have come to Tom's house for orders. Then, this is the man to whom the detective intrusted his letter.

I walk over and accost him.

"Beg pardon, but are you the man my friend up at Cartaret's gave a letter to mail?"

He starts, and his hand involuntarily goes halfway up to his pocket.

"Yes, sir."

"Have you mailed it?"

"Immediately I arrived—it went on the next train to the city."

I know he lies—I can read it in his face—but have no reason to accuse him of it; so I return to my place at the station.

In a few minutes I see the butcher boy sneak into the post-office, and I smile, for he goes to mail the letter he has forgotten. He is just like all other members of the male sex—forgetful of the letter in his pocket.

It helps me out, and I can afford to laugh.

CHAPTER XI

THE OFFICE OF M. GAUTIER

At 11:30 I find myself walking up Broadway, in the neighborhood of Union Square, looking for the number that has been given as the address of Philip Gautier.

The detective knows him, and has said there is no reason to believe him other than a gentleman; but I have my own ideas on the subject, and intend to do some good work for Tom

Ah! here is the number at last. I look over the directory upon the wall, and find that Philip Gautier has room 27, on the third floor.

When I reach it, I see his name in gold letters there, but no indication of his business. I knock, and a voice calls out:

"Enter."

The office is nicely fitted up, even to paintings on the wall, and I see that M. Gautier has an eye for the beautiful. Still, there is no indication of his business.

A desk stands near the window, and seated at this is a man, French in his looks, not unhandsome in his way, but, if I am any judge of character as expressed by the face, unprincipled.

It strikes me that this is my man, and I study him even in the short time I stand there, while I notice that an uneasy look upon his face has been succeeded by one of relief.

Evidently he has feared his visitor might prove to be someone else—my mind immediately goes to Tom Cartaret.

"Am I right in believing this is M. Gautier?"

He bows.

"M. Philip Gautier?" I continue, it being my desire to be as ceremonious as possible.

"You are quite right, sir."

His English is remarkably good—there is just the faintest tinge of a foreign accent. I rather like it.

All this while I am studying the face of the Frenchman, and I make up my mind that he is not possessed of a very stiff backbone, which is all the better for my purpose.

"I have a little business with you, M. Gautier. Permit me to hand you my card," which I do with a bow.

He glances at it.

"Ah! a lawyer."

"Yes, and the personal friend of Tom Cartaret."

At these words a swift change passes over his countenance. He looks alarmed. I am already convinced that I will not have a great deal of trouble with my man.

"Indeed!" is the only reply he makes.

I assume a stern look, and my countenance is such that upon occasions I can appear very fierce.

"I presume there is no need of my introducing the subject, M. Gautier. You can guess in your soul why I am here."

"You flatter me," he stammers. "I have known one Tom Cartaret, but cannot conjecture why he should send you here."

"Ah! my dear man, he has not sent me; he does not know of my coming—indeed, he would be very angry if he knew of it."

"You speak in riddles."

Upon this, I take out the infamous letter sent to Luther Cartaret. Slyly watching my man while I pretend to be engaged with the paper, I see him start and his eyes dilate. This is all I need to convince me that he is guilty.

"You have seen this before, M. Gautier—do you know one Jules Garribrant?"

"Yes; he is a friend of mine."

"A very intimate one?"

"Possibly."

"In fact, my dear Gautier, he is—yourself."

At that he gives a defiant little laugh.

"You make a bold assertion—how will you prove it?" he asks, mockingly.

"Thus."

I simply pick up a letter he has been writing, and hold it side by side with the other. A novice could easily see that the same hand penned both.

Gautier laughs hysterically again.

"That's the lawyer of it, I suppose."

"You admit its truth?"

"Well, what then?" defiantly.

I move my chair a little closer.

"Just this, M. Gautier: your life is not worth a pinch of snuff if you are the man who has dared write these lies respecting the honor of Tom Cartaret's wife."

The man is a natural coward, which can be said of few Frenchmen. He evidently believes I am about to avenge the insult on the spot, for he moves away from me.

"Monsieur, you would not use violence? I am unarmed, and not of your size."

"So much the worse for you, then. But fear not; I do not mean to lay a hand on you. There is one coming after me who can avenge his own wrongs."

"*Sacre!* you mean—"

"Tom Cartaret, the husband of the lady whom you have so foully slandered in this document," rapping the paper violently.

"By that time I shall be armed," he mutters, an ugly light creeping into his eyes.

"Armed! Good heavens! man, if you were

armed a dozen times, it would avail you nothing. the man is stark mad on the one subject of taking your life. He will find you if you are in New York two hours from now. Let me tell you what has happened: he has quarreled with his father about this paper, and there has been bad blood spilt. Tom swears it is all your fault, and he will have your life if he follows you to Hades. He is coming now—I managed that he should miss the train that I got. You have just one hour, M. Philip Gautier, and then a crazy man will be hammering at your office door, seeking your blood—just one hour to live, if you are a fool."

I have the enemy on the run. The Frenchman is badly frightened at the picture I have laid before him, and will come to terms.

Of course he does not suspect the truth, for he has not an inkling of the game.

"Why have you come to warn me?—you have never seen me before."

"Bah! man, it is not for love of you I do this, but to save my friend from murder. I reasoned with him as long as I could, and, you see, was finally forced to try diplomacy."

"An hour, you say?" looking at his watch, and I notice how the coward's hand trembles.

"At the outside. You must be on your way to

the station, unless you desire to meet him and have a life-and-death struggle here."

"I am a prudent man, monsieur, and I do not care to enter another world just yet. You say he is a madman?"

"Mad as a March hare, and only thirsting for your blood."

"I will go. It is best, perhaps."

Even in his alarm I see a sardonic smile appear on his face. The villain rejoices in the fact that he has brought trouble upon those he hates—the woman who scorned his love, and the successful rival who won the prize.

I feel almost tempted to do a little chastising myself, and the fellow would be but a pigmy in my athletic grasp, but, being a lawyer, I forbear—the legal consequences of such a little frolic would hardly be counterbalanced by the enjoyment I might take in the deal.

I sit there, and see M. Gautier begin to pack certain papers in a hand-bag.

"I shall remain until you are ready to go, M. Gautier, for fear this mad husband may manage in some way to get into the city sooner than I expect. At the worst, I hope to have some influence over him, though I do not imagine it would do any good. In his present frame of mind, he lives but for revenge, and would pass any barrier to get at you."

"I HAVE A LITTLE BUSINESS WITH YOU, MR. GAUTIER."
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"I have seen Tom Cartaret in action, and, *mon Dieu!* I do not want to be pulverized. He stole my love away. I swore revenge—I have had it, but do not care to pay for it with my life."

Thus muttering, the French masher proceeds to gather up the valuable papers.

"What will you do with these?" I ask, pointing to the paintings around.

"I know a man who will take my office and pay me a fair price—on the way to my lodgings I shall see him," he replies.

"You will be wise to put the sea between yourself and Tom Cartaret as soon as possible."

"I shall. There are other reasons that call me back to La Belle France, of which you know nothing. A steamer sails this afternoon—I shall have time to gain it."

I feel contented. In the first move of the game I have checked the enemy's king—perhaps Mr. Smithers may not find a lawyer such a fool for an antagonist, after all.

After a while Gautier announces himself as ready to move. I offer him my hand.

"Monsieur, permit me to wish you *bon voyage.* You are a sensible man—only a fool would remain when there was everything to lose and really nothing to gain."

He seems pleased at my rather ambiguous praise, and shakes hands cordially.

'*Parbleu*, monsieur; we may meet again. *Au revoir;*" and with a salute he is gone, the key of his office thrust into his pocket.

I experience a wonderful sense of relief when, stepping to a window in the hallway and looking out, I see the Frenchman call a cab, jump in, and the vehicle go dashing madly away.

That is one danger out of the way.

The thought occurs to me that he may have his letters forwarded somewhere, and I make up my mind to try and intercept the one from Mr. Smithers.

Hardly have I reached the door below before a postman comes along.

"Anything for M. Gautier?" I ask.

He glances at me, and thrusts a letter into my hand, passing on. One look tells me how luck is playing into my game—the letter is postmarked Clifton. I calmly put it in my pocket, and walk down the street.

It is dinner-time, and my thoughts are toward appeasing the inner man. Walking down Broadway, I enter a restaurant, and in half an hour have accomplished my purpose.

Now for Clifton again. A great way to spend one's vacation, this is; but I mean to stand by Tom as long as I can do him any good, and when the crisis has passed, go off alone for an outing.

I am in time for the train leaving at 2:07,

and when flying along into the country once more my spirits rise—the lovely foliage again cheers me, and I begin to hope for the best.

Every time I think of Smithers I grin, for it is certainly a feather in my cap to be able to outwit that keen individual.

I have secured a morning paper and an early edition of an afternoon sheet. The latter gives a dozen lines to the mysterious death of Luther Cartaret, but promises its readers further details on the morrow, hinting at the crime being the work of a discharged servant—which idea must have originated in the reporter's brain.

Turning from this sensational sheet to the staid *Herald*, I find that a vessel of the French Transatlantic Line—La Bourgogne—sails at 2: 30—it is just that as I read, and I chuckle at the reflection that Monsieur Gautier is on board, while I think of the letter I am the bearer of to its writer.

We near Clifton. I will have to hire a vehicle of some sort to take me to Maplehurst, but there is a livery stable near the station, and that will be no trouble.

I wonder if any new developments have arisen in the case since my departure, and what the detective has been up to.

Then Clifton is called. I leave my seat, step off the train, and come face to face with the object of my thoughts, who is pacing the platform.

CHAPTER XII

MR. SMITHERS FINDS HIMSELF LEFT

At sight of me, Mr. Smithers smiles, but I notice he looks uneasy.

"Hello! Peters, where have you been?" he exclaims rather boisterously.

"To the city on a little business," I reply.

"You're in luck. Uncle Jethro brought me over in the light wagon—he came to do a little marketing, I reckon—there's the vehicle yonder, and you are saved the expense of hire."

"That is luck, indeed. But whither away? Are you off duty?"

"Not at all. I am merely following my letter," he replies, quietly.

My time has come.

"You mean to M. Gautier?"

"Yes."

I hand him the letter.

"Tit for tat—I save you a useless journey."

"Confusion! where did you get this?—it is postmarked at Clifton," he cries.

"It arrived after M. Gautier had gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes, to the steamer."

"Mr. Peters, do you mean to tell me—"

"That M. Philip Gautier, in deadly fear of the mad husband who seeks his life, is now on the steamer La Bourgogne, steaming down New York harbor, bound for France."

He looks as if paralyzed for a moment; then bursts into a laugh, and seizes my hand.

"Good heavens! Peters, what a fool you were to adopt the law as a profession, when you have the making of a detective in your head."

"Thanks," I return, dryly; "but I prefer the more honorable calling. It does not please me to hunt down women and wretched men. I would rather try to assist poor humanity hunted by sharks in the guise of men."

He shrugs his shoulders at my remark, but does not resent it. I can see that the man has a higher opinion of my abilities than he had before, and this gives me satisfaction.

"Well, there is no need of my going into town, then, if Gautier has flown, and I might as well return with you."

So we cross over to where the two-seated light wagon with the span of horses stands. Uncle Jethro coming out, grins when he sees his passengers, and shoving his purchases under the seat, announces himself ready to return.

I enjoy the ride back.

Mr. Smithers does not say much, but I am con-

scious of the fact that his eyes are on me very often, as though I have become an object of new interest to him.

Of course, now that war has been declared between us, he will no longer confide to me what he may have discovered, and hence I am left quite in the dark as to whether anything new has come upon the carpet since I left.

A man of such remarkable activity as Smithers could not rest inactive for hours, so I conclude he has been prying around the place.

When he discovered my flitting I do not know, but it must have been quite a time after my departure, judging from the train he was about to take.

We reach Maplehurst, and find all quiet.

"The coroner was here," remarks Smithers.

"Ah! and the inquest?"

"Will be held to-morrow. I persuaded him to put it off, and he agreed. With his jury he inspected the body and the room, leaving the taking of evidence until a later hour."

"That is good," I remark.

"Yes, it gives us a chance to work. Before that time has elapsed, I hope one of us will have struck a winning gait."

"Ditto, Mr. Smithers."

"Do you know, Peters, I'm growing a little fearful about you. This trick was as sly a dodge

as ever I heard of. Why, man alive! I couldn't have done it better myself."

"That is praise indeed."

"Well, I've been brought up to the business, and you're but an amateur—that's what gets me. I really didn't believe it was in you."

He speaks earnestly, and I believe he means it, but I smile without replying. Perhaps the opportunity may come yet when I can show him there is something more in the man of law. I never wished for anything half so much in my life, partly on my own account, but more because of poor Tom, for a victory on my part would mean relief to him.

In the house I part from the detective, who enters the library. I do not care to go into that room again, feeling that the less I see of that grim figure the better. As the coroner's jury has viewed the remains, an undertaker has been sent for who will soon be on hand to take charge, and things will bear a different appearance in the library.

The country coroner was a doctor, and he had been deeply impressed with the grave nature of the case to which he had been called—at least so I have understood from a few words dropped by the detective officer.

It is no light ' 'ng when a man as well known as Luther Cartaret is found murdered in his own

library, and the whole country is apt to ring with the story.

This publicity is what always makes such a tragedy harder to bear by the relatives of the deceased—their family secrets are laid bare, their peculiarities discussed, sacred things made merry over, and all privacy destroyed.

I asked Uncle Jethro about Tom, and learned that he had spent most of the time beside his wife. She was much better now, and he had gone out somewhere for a walk.

It seems as though the coast is clear for me, and I cannot but improve the opportunity to look through the house.

Smithers has been through it, looking for evidence to be used against the inmates, and I don't see why I should be debarred from the same privilege when I am working in the interest of the Cartaret family.

I have been in the second story when visiting Tom before—indeed, there is a small room which he always called mine.

Above is still another floor—more of an attic than anything else—and here I fancy I may find something to interest me.

All is as quiet as death itself about the house, and making sure of this point, I head in the direction of the attic staircase. The door at the foot of this can be locked, but I do not find it in

that condition, and have no trouble in mounting to the top.

Here I find several rooms. All are connected and open save one, which seems to be a sort of store-room, wherein are kept the house supplies.

There is no one about, and yet evidence is not lacking to show that these rooms have of late been occupied. There may have been some company at Maplehurst, but this would be a queer place to put them, unless it happened to be some country cousin who would not know the difference.

Looking out of a small window, I could see the stable—Uncle Jethro is at work with his horses. Perhaps this was the window the detective was looking from when he saw me conversing with the coachman.

I wonder what he thought of the place, or whether he bothered his head about it at all.

One thing I notice—that each window, small as it is, has a stout oaken bar nailed across the inside. Perhaps they are very much afraid lest burglars might get in that way—there may have been a possible chance for them to gain the roof of the house, and once this is done, a bold swing on the part of the thief would suffice to give him a grip on the window.

There seems to be nothing for me up here, and I conclude to go down again. While passing to-

ward the stairs I come across a shoe that attracts my attention. With a tape-line I measure it, and then compare the result with some figures I already have in my note-book. The result surprises me.

"Humph! a mere coincidence. I will go downstairs again. Perhaps a little talk with old Jethro might throw further light on the matter. There may be arguments by means of which I can convince him that confession is good for the soul," I mutter.

True, old Jethro is dead-set in his ways, and as stubborn as a mule; but there is, as a last resource, one argument I can bring to bear that will be apt to fetch him.

Suppose I give him to understand that all the circumstances point to Tom as the guilty party; his fears for the young master whom he loves will certainly cause him to speak.

There is good reason for saying this, too, since Tom himself has confessed the deed in order to screen one he believes guilty.

Thus, if I can only get the negro to tell what he knows, I will be able to settle the matter.

It certainly looks gloomy enough as it rests now, with the evidence all pointing toward Tom Cartaret's wife, and Tom himself vehemently declaring himself responsible for the deed.

Thus reflecting on the vagaries of human life,

I am walking quietly down the hall on the second floor toward the stairs, when my attention is arrested. From one of the rooms comes a white figure. The face is pale as death, and I hardly recognize Tom's wife in the wretched-looking lady approaching.

She has not seen me as yet, and I shrink back, hoping she will go by; but I hear her utter a little cry, and know I am discovered.

Then she glides up to me, her hands held out, a look of mute entreaty on her face.

"You are Tom's friend, Mr. Peters?" she says.

"And very glad to meet you, Mrs. Cartaret, but so sorry it is under such peculiar circumstances."

She shudders; poor thing! I am infinitely pained to see how this tragedy has affected her. No living soul could act that part. She is horrified at something—as I told Smithers, either because she has discovered the work of her sleeping hours, or else suspects Tom of being guilty.

I can feel her eyes upon my face; they seem to burn me with their gaze.

"You have known Tom man vears?" she says.

"Yes; since we were boys at college," I reply, fortifying myself for what is to come.

"Did you ever know him to do a mean act?"

"Never!" and my soul speaks then.

"Did you believe him to be hasty and quick-tempered?"

"Yes, on a number of occasions," I reply; for the truth must be told though the heavens fall.

She stifles a groan at this; no doubt it is a blow against her hopes.

Still those star-like eyes are fastened on my face as she searches for a ray of light, and I know what is coming.

"Mr. Peters, will you answer a question?"

"To you—yes Mrs. Cartaret."

"Do you believe Tom guilty of this awful crime?" she almost whispers, as though afraid to hear the sound of her own voice.

It is said, and somehow a wild feeling of exultation passes over me—if she be guilty, she has not yet realized the truth. I hope that she is as innocent as she believes herself.

"On my honor, I assure you I do not," is the steady reply I make.

Her face lights up, almost glorified.

"God bless you for those words, Mr. Peters! My doubts and fears were killing me. Your blessed, comforting words give me new life;" and before I can prevent her, the lovely creature has snatched one of my hands and kissed it in gratitude, vanishing within the room, and leaving me battling with conflicting emotions of joy and fear.

CHAPT XIII

A FRIEND IN NEED

My courage grows apace.

After this rather singu ar interview with Tom's wife, I endeavor to analyze the case as it now stands, and my success gives me new hopes for the future.

A man as suspicious as Smithers, always expecting the worst of people, might have thought that she was playing a part. The idea enters my mind also, but I banish it utterly.

Remembering her face and manner, I am ready to swear to one thing: if Tom's wife has done this awful deed, the consciousness of her guilt has not yet dawned upon her mind—all her fears are for her husband.

I may be mistaken, but am ready to lay much upon this line of reasoning. Then, if it be true, as Smithers has declared, what a shock is in store for the poor creature. It must surely turn her brain to have that man arrest her for the murder of Luther Cartaret, and point to the tell-tale stain on her dress as evidence of her truth. Heaven help Tom Cartaret's wife when it comes to that point!

First of all, I desire to find Tom, and have a little chat with him. It is my desire to know whether he has ever heard of his wife walking in her sleep. Her actions on that night seem to me to have been the result of some such peculiar fit as somnambulism.

Peeping into the rooms below, I do not see him. Voices in the library attract me, and there I find Smithers talking to a couple of men whom I understand to be the undertaker and his assistant.

Then Tom has not yet come in.

I pass out, and stroll along the walk. It is one of the early November days, and as Jack Frost came late this year, vegetation is just in its glory; but to many the crimson is a sad sign—they think it indicative of coming death and winter, just as the consumptive's cheeks show the scarlet flag when the dread disease has reached the last turn, and the race for the home stake begins. To me it never brings such thoughts, for my blood is that of a sportsman; the bracing air is life-giving after the heat of summer, and the scenery—well, every year I look upon it, I think it worth while living through a summer to be greeted by such a spectacle.

They tell us that the man who has no music in his soul is fit for treason, stratagem, and spoils; but what can you think of one who views such a gorgeous scene as Nature in her dress of crim-

son and gold, unmoved? Surely there is something dwarfed in that being.

Sure enough, as I stroll about, I discover the object of my thoughts wandering along a path not far from the wall separating the Cartaret estate from the great cemetery.

The sight of that wall causes me to remember the foot-prints I followed, and I determine to do more toward looking into that mystery after I have done with Tom.

He does not notice my approach, for his head is bent low upon his chest, as though the weight of his sorrow presses heavily upon him. I would give a good deal if it were my privilege to utter magic words that would give him new life—it would be the happiest moment of my life if such a thing could be; but I must have patience—the time has not yet come.

As Tom draws near, I stand and wait for him to reach me, which he soon does, and even then, failing to notice my presence, is about to pass by, when I clap my hand upon his shoulder.

"Tom, old boy, cheer up!"

He starts at my words, and looks suddenly into my face. Swift emotions chase each other over his countenance—alarm, hope, despair, one after another are seen.

"Ah! it's you, John. Where have you been?"

"To the city; some business came up that had to be done, and I went to finish it."

"Did you see him?"

"Whom?"

"Philip Gautier."

I see there is no way of getting out of it—he possibly suspects that the nature of my mission is connected with that man, and I must tell him what I have done. To do that, I will have to cause him pain, for I must refer to the fact that Smithers believes his wife guilty. Still, by the aid of a little strategy, I may be able to tide over this difficulty.

"Yes, I have seen him, Tom," I reply.

His face lights up.

"Did you give him the thrashing he deserved —what I would have done for him?"

I shake my head.

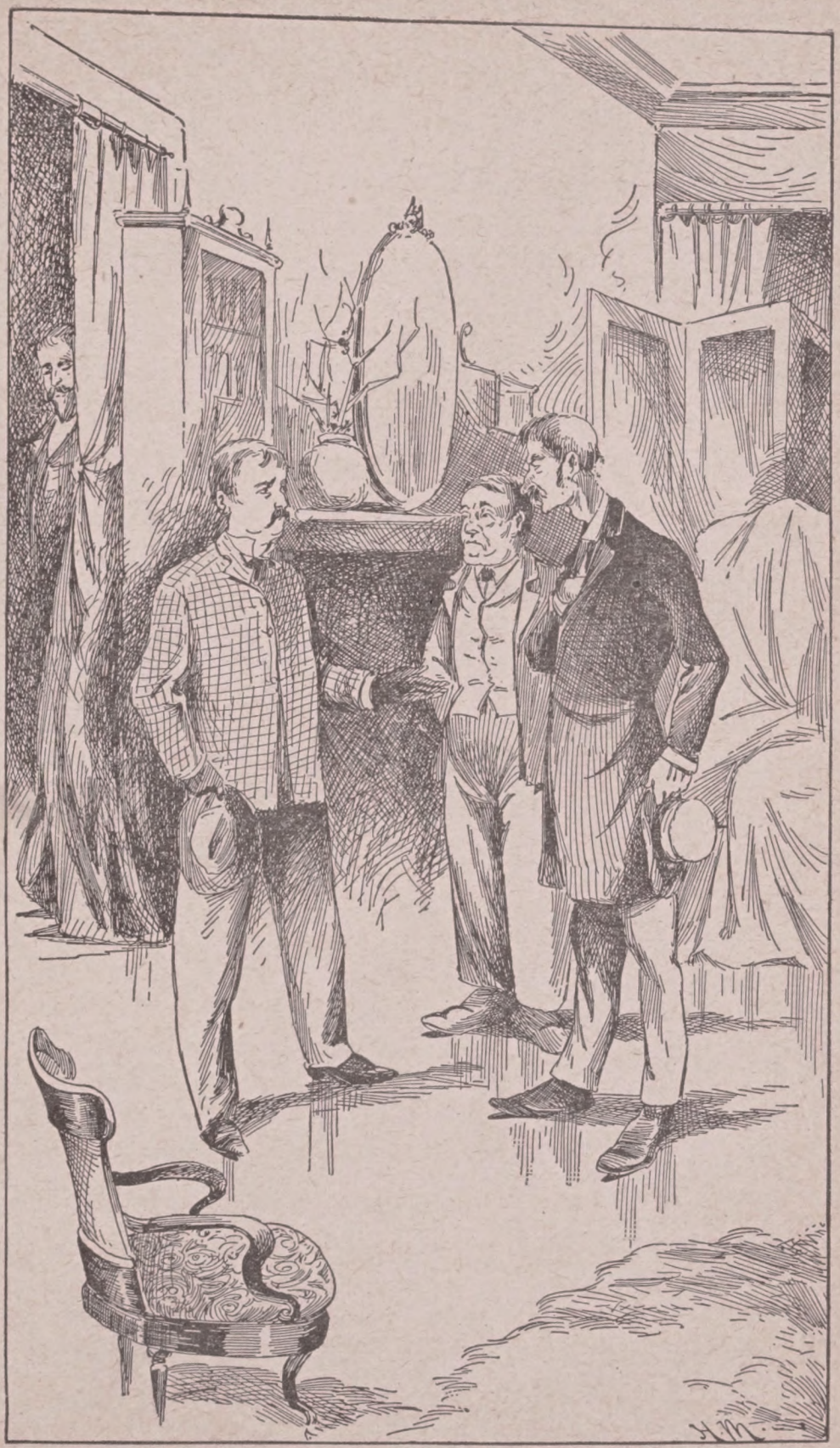
"Much as I would have liked it, that would have been folly. The result must have been disastrous for your family name."

"Then, why did you seek him, John?"

"First, to make sure that he and Jules Garribrant were one and the same person. I proved that to him before his very eyes, and he confessed."

"The villain!" breathes Tom.

"Yes, he is a rascal, if ever such existed. My idea was simply this: he would be called upon,



I FIND SMITHERS TALKING TO A COUPLE OF MEN.—Page 118.

in the event of a trial, to testify, and such a thing would give him the chance he desired to work you and yours a bad turn. I determined he should not have this satisfaction, so I bundled him out of the country, bag and baggage."

"What?"

"He is now on the steamer La Bourgogne, bound down New York harbor past Sandy Hook, and headed for Havre, France."

"John, you're a conjurer! By what magic did you induce him to take this sudden sea voyage?"

"The magic of your name."

"Eh?"

"I simply told him that you had gone crazy over the effect of that letter, and were bound for the city to have his life. Then I told how I had by trickery delayed you an hour on the way, at the end of which time a madman would be at his door seeking his life. He fears you as much as he hates you, and readily consented to leave the country at once. I imagine he has been engaged in some swindling business anyhow, and is anxious to get away. At any rate, he is gone, and a good riddance of bad rubbish."

"John, you are a friend indeed!" he says, warmly.

"I wish to be more of one to you, Tom. It is my earnest desire to bring happiness home to you here again."

He passes his hand wearily over his forehead.

"Happiness! I never expect to know it again."

"I trust it is not so bad as that. In the first place, Tom, you must know that I have entered into the detective business."

At that he looks me in the face reproachfully.

"You too, John?"

"Stop. You don't understand. I told Smithers I would set up an opposition bureau to him, and while he endeavored to prove a certain person guilty, I would be working to prove innocence."

At that he grasps my hand—how fierce his clutch is; but I return it warmly.

"Now, Tom, between you and me let all be frankness. You are in a desperate condition of mind. I believe I can do you good. You need the sympathy and counsel of a friend. I know all your hopes and fears, my dear fellow. Lean on me, and you will feel better."

He sighs heavily.

"I do feel better already, to know I have such a friend in my time of trouble. God bless you, John Peters!" he says, brokenly.

"Now, old comrade, we are where no hostile ears can overhear us; you must confide in me."

He looks startled, and moves uneasily.

"In the first place, your confession made no impression on me—I know you did not do that

thing. Mr. Smithers overheard what you said, and scorned it as nonsense."

Tom's head sinks again—in dejection, he realizes that his desperate plan is a failure. Right or left, he knows not which way to turn, in order to find relief.

"Putting that aside, Tom, there is one who did believe in your guilt, though not now."

"Who is that?"

"Your wife!"

Tom looks at me strangely.

"Do you mean that?" he asks.

"I do. She knew you had quarreled with your father, and the most natural conclusion that could be reached was that you had done this in the heat of anger. You remember her words when she came into the library and saw the body—her thoughts were of you."

In great mental distress he clutches his temples, and looks at me with such an agonizing expression that I pause to give him a chance to free his mind.

"John, if what you tell me is true—and I pray God you are not deceiving me—how can Madge be guilty?" he utters in a steady yet strained voice.

This is my opportunity—the entering wedge has been sent into the heart of oak, and with quick blows I must drive it home.

"There is only one way in which such a phenomenon can be explained, Tom."

"Then, let me hear it."

"If your wife is guilty—and I am far from convinced that she is—she may have done this deed without knowing it."

His face grows dark again.

"John, is that your consolation? It mocks my misery. How could a living soul commit such a crime, and, as you insinuate, be ignorant of it? No, no! this is some chimera you are pursuing—a false light—a will-o'-the-wisp," he groans.

"Wait, and you may secure a crumb of comfort from what I have to say. Such a thing is possible. People who are drunk or crazy have done things of which in their sane moments they have not the slightest recollection."

"That may be true, John; but my wife was neither drunk nor crazy last night. Such a theory will not hold good," he replies, sadly.

I am ready to put the question now, upon which so much depends.

"Tom, has your wife ever told you—do you know from personal observation—that she is a somnambulist?"

Although my voice is steady, and my manner nonchalant, I am in a cold sweat while awaiting his answer. He waits only a few seconds, but they seem hours to me.

"Yes, I have known that," he replies.

My heart gives a bound.

"Then, Tom, your wife was walking in her sleep last night!" I exclaim.

"Strange," he says, thoughtfully, "that I never noticed that before—it did not occur to me."

"But you can believe it?"

"Yes, I *know* it is so, now. I remember that she passed along the hall and into her own room in a mechanical way, such as a sleep-walker possesses. Yes, it is true."

"Tom, were you aroused by a strange noise, too?"

"Yes; I could not place it at the time, but now" —with a shudder—"I *know* what it was. But you speak as though someone else heard it?"

"Aunty Chloe. She arose, and looked out of the window. Then, hearing a sound in the hall, she saw your wife standing at the window and apparently looking out, the moonlight flooding her with its white beams. Before Chloe could speak, your wife turned and glided into her room. If you were near by, Chloe did not see you."

"John, old fellow, bless you for your words of cheer! It will indeed be much, if we can know Madge is innocent in mind;" and he grasps my hand again in his feverish clutch.

"My dear boy, that is the first point. I hope to be able to prove that your wife is as innocent as I am of this terrible crime," I say, steadily.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SPECTER AMONG THE TOMBS

I am pleased to see what a change has taken place in Tom—the haggard look upon his face has been in a measure dissipated, and in its stead has come one of hope.

He has something to live for now; and believing it may help to arouse him, I relate the incident of my accidental meeting with Madge—her looks and actions, with what she said.

He drinks it all in eagerly, and, as I hoped, it seems to do him good. The man I look upon now is not the Tom of an hour back.

"Is there anything I can do, John?" he asks, when I have finished. "You know I have more at stake in this game than any other living soul, and it would be such a pleasure to be able to do something for her sake."

I have not told him my vague plans, for I do not wish to arouse any hopes within him that may fail to have even a foundation. Still, there is something that has occurred to me.

"Perhaps you can do me a favor. I wish to know the truth as soon as possible. When I met

your wife, just now, I saw she had changed her dress—she no longer wore the creamy one in which she was garbed when she entered the library and swooned, but a dead-white robe. Can you secure the skirt of that creamy dress without her knowledge?"

"Tell me your motive. I can guess—but—"

"Plainly, Tom, Smithers lays great stress upon a stain near the hem of that dress—it looks like a dark splash of dried blood."

He shudders.

"And you?"

"I desire to take it to a chemist friend of mine, who will, for my sake, make an analysis, and give me a written opinion of the material causing the stain."

Tom seems to reflect a moment.

"I will do it. In half an hour the skirt will be in your possession. It is a light, fleecy affair, and weighs but little. Madge detests dark colors, and all of her dresses have been in light shades; but now, poor girl, she must dress in black."

"Then, in half an hour or so, I will meet you here, Tom."

"Very good."

He leaves me a different man from the one I met walking about the grounds. There is a spring to his walk, and his head is carried erect once more. It gives me pleasure to see

him looking like the Tom of yore, and I more than ever resolve to let no stone remain unturned in order to accomplish the object I have before me.

When he has gone from sight, I walk in the direction of the door or gate in the wall.

No one is in sight. The sun has dropped quite a distance down the western sky, and now hangs above the hills like a ball of fire suspended in space, his cheering warmth feeling very comfortable while the cool north breeze fans one's cheeks.

Another minute, and I am looking upon the silent city of the dead.

Standing there, my thoughts very naturally become somewhat depressed; no one can find himself alone in a grave-yard and feel otherwise—strange thoughts intrude themselves on the mind, and we see visions, as it were.

I thrust such thoughts away, for I have business ahead. If the party who passed through this door went into the cemetery, perhaps I can find a trace of him there.

So I look around me, examining the ground. It is not hard, for a rain has recently fallen, and the sun has not been strong enough to bake the earth, so I have an idea I may find a continuation of the trail.

At this hour no one seems to be in the cem-

etery—at least the quarter where I find myself appears to be quite deserted.

There are old graves here, tombs and dilapidated stones dating back a century and more. Few people care to see these, so that nearly all the parties visiting the cemetery wander through the beautiful new portion, and avoid the cold-looking region where bodies were buried as far back as 1700.

I chance to know that old Luther Cartaret was very fond of wandering in this place, which was the reason he had caused the door to be made in the wall.

His first wife, Tom's mother, lies buried here, and many times on moonlight nights the old poet was wont to walk to her grave, and there keep a lonely vigil while he communed with nature and drew inspiration from the stars. More than one of his poems, which I had read, Tom told me, had been composed at his wife's grave.

There is quite a beaten path leading from the door into the heart of the patch of weeping willows, and seeing no isolated foot-prints that correspond with the one I have examined so closely within the grounds, I proceed along this narrow trail.

Of course, I know where it will lead me, and am not at all surprised when, after passing under the shadow of the willows, and among a num-

ber of dilapidated tombs, I find myself looking upon a square patch of ground where the grass has been kept cut and flowers planted, which, of course, the frost has nipped.

A granite stone is erected there, and standing before it, I read the inscription:

"Sacred to the memory of
JEANETTE,
Beloved wife of Luther Cartaret, who departed this life June 23d, 186—, aged 27 years 4 months and 5 days.
Beyond the gates she waits for me."

That is Tom's mother. He has no recollection of her, being a small child when she was taken to this her last resting-place.

Only one other stone is in the lot; it is a small one, and does not appear to mark a grave, but simply stands as a remembrance.

This is often done; sailors buried at sea have a slab erected "in memory of," to show that they are not forgotten.

To my surprise, as I bend forward, I notice that some vandal hand has been rude enough to mar the inscription—it looks as though a sharp-pointed stone had been used to pound the tablet, and only with exceeding difficulty am I able to decipher what little it contains:

RACHEL BABETTE.
1881.

That is all, but I grasp the whole; to me it is easy to read between the lines.

I remember the name. Rachel was Luther Cartaret's second wife—she who had so basely left him to run away with a handsome rascal, who, of course, cast her adrift on the world.

When he received news of her death, from some source, years later, Luther had caused this slab to be placed here. Perhaps he had loved her truly, and his heart may have been sorely wounded by her action. After her death the bitterness left him, and he had erected this stone to show that he forgave.

Standing here, or seated near by, the old man must have had many strange thoughts as he compared the qualities of the two women to whom he had given his love and name.

I have knelt down, the better to see the words upon the battered slab, and remain in that position while allowing my thoughts free play.

Soon Luther Cartaret will be placed beside his Jean. I notice that the other stone is in a corner of the lot, removed from the shaft that marks his first wife's grave, and have no doubt but that this has been done with a purpose in view.

While thus engaged with my thoughts, I hear a rustling in the bushes near by, and look up, wondering if it can be a rabbit that my coming

has disturbed, or a gray squirrel hunting among the fallen leaves for nuts.

A movement catches my eye, and I see something that holds my gaze riveted in a horrified manner. I seem under a spell, and though I would give much to move, my limbs act as if suddenly held in a vise-like grip.

What is it I see? Only a face amid the dense vegetation about a neighboring tumble-down tomb; but that face surely must belong to the spirits that haunt this old grave-yard—it cannot be human.

In looks it is demoniacal, and the long, tangled gray hair that is matted around tells me it belongs to a woman. That she is as mad as a March hare is evident at a glance—she glowers at me as though tempted to leap forward and attack me where I crouch.

I have never believed myself a coward; but the condition of things is such that I would just as soon see a tiger looking at me from those bushes as this awful apparition.

Undoubtedly there must be some asylum in the neighborhood, and one of its inmates has secured her freedom. I believe it is customary for such poor, demented creatures to seek safety in a grave-yard—there is something about the place that satisfies their desire for loneliness; and, besides, an asylum is often given by some old tomb or sepulcher.

I realize that under such conditions a bold front generally cows a deranged person, so I at last succeed in gaining my feet and walking toward the wild-looking creature.

She gives a cry; I can see her throw aloft her arms, the elfin locks are shaken, and then a blank space remains where the head has been.

I continue to advance, and presently reach the spot where she has been. There lies the old tomb, its door dilapidated; and a long shaft of light from the western sun pierces its interior, revealing it all to my gaze.

There is no sign of the mad creature about, though I have no doubt she has been in this very sepulcher perhaps for days.

The gloom and chill of the place discountenance any further observations on my part, and I am just about to turn away, when, near the plot of the Cartarets, close by the defaced slab, I see a plain foot-print in the earth.

It looks familiar—I bend down and examine it, and satisfied at last, take out my tape-line and measure it. The result is, that I believe the man whom Uncle Jethro saw about the grounds, and whose foot-print I followed toward the door in the wall, has been here beside the grave of Tom's mother.

Just then this does not strike me as more than ordinarily singular; later on, the true sig-

nificance comes home, and I see things through a pair of inspired glasses.

I turn away with a sigh for the old man who will soon be laid away at rest under this green turf, undisturbed for many a year, but my thoughts are principally for the two Cartarets left behind —Tom and his sweet wife—upon whom has fallen this dark shadow.

When I reach the door in the wall I make sure to fasten it as well as I can, but there is no means of locking it, which fact I deplore, remembering the fearful-looking creature I have seen while among the tombs. Perhaps I had better warn Uncle Jethro, so that he can take a hammer and a nail and secure the door temporarily. With this idea in my mind, I walk in the direction of the stables.

Uncle Jethro is sure to be there, and if the opportunity is fitting, I may ask him a few other questions regarding certain things. I have not changed my mind about the old fellow, to any great extent, and believe now, just as before, that, did he choose to talk, he could throw much light on this dark mystery.

Before long I mean to put my plan into execution, and by a method of compulsion force the old man to reveal all he does know, whether that be little or much—against Tom's wife, or in her favor. The time has not yet come, however. Patience, John Peters.

CHAPTER XV

UNCLE JETHRO ON THE STAND

Yes, there is my old friend Jethro, busily engaged in shining up the silver bits on the harness. Evidently he finds plenty to keep him busy, while he mourns in his heart for the old master who is being laid out in the library by the undertaker and his assistant.

He sees me coming, but does not greet me with his usual good-natured grin. Uncle Jethro is changed. He does not seem to be the same jolly fellow who used to go with Tom and me upon some of our hunting or fishing trips, to cook, take care of camp, and look after us generally. In fact, I am prone to believe he has a sort of fear of me now—my coming, perhaps, has, in his mind, brought bad luck to the house of Cartaret, or it may be he has some other reason for his uneasiness.

I remember that when last I saw him I gave the old man quite a dressing, and elicited facts which he fain would have concealed. He may believe I am about to continue the cross-questioning, and in this he is right.

"Ah! Uncle, busy as usual," I remark, taking a seat upon an overturned horse-bucket near by.

"Yes, sah; I'se got plenty to do, an' does it wid a cheerful spirit. Reckon I'll keep so till Gabriel sounds his trumpet, and old Jeth he laid out like de marse yonder."

"I hope you don't expect to meet such a violent death?"

"Gorry, no! Marse John. I hope ter die peacefully, like a Christian, in my bed. An' I ain't afraid ter go, neither, wen de time comes. My ole 'ooman Dinah waitin' foah me whar de wicked cease from trubblin' an' de weary am at rest."

"Uncle, is there an insane asylum anywhere near this place?"

"A what, honey?"

"A mad-house, Uncle."

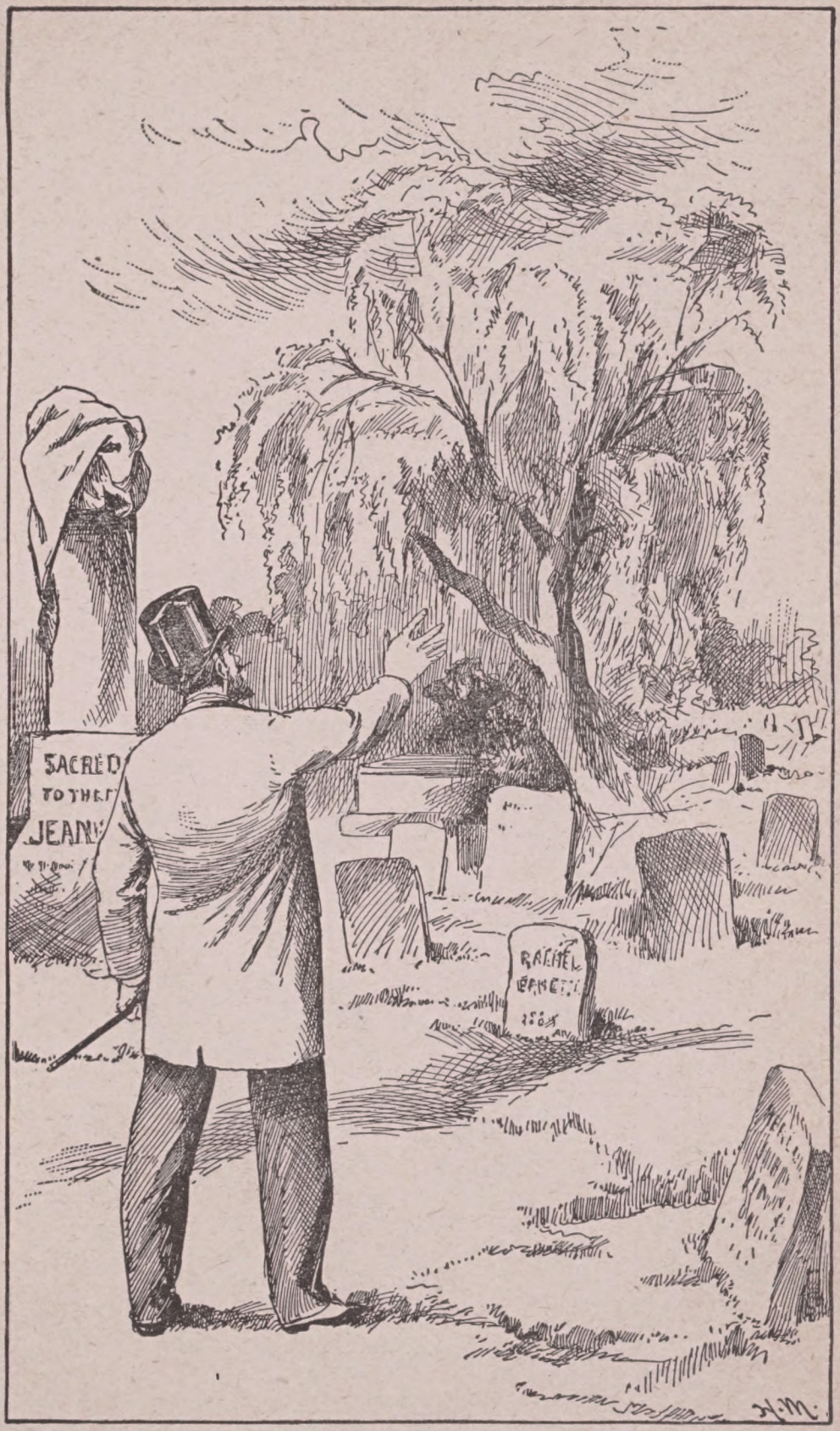
The old man stops his rubbing, and a look of deep uneasiness shows upon his black face.

"What for you ask dat ob me, Marse John?" he queries, with a cunning glance, as though he would read the answer in my face.

"I have a reason. You said you hoped you would not die a violent death, and I remembered something that made such a thing possible: one of the inmates of the mad-house has escaped, Uncle."

"De Lor' help us!"

"I saw her in the grave-yard—a fearful creature



I SEE SOMETHING THAT HOLDS MY GAZE RIVITED IN A HORRIFIED MANNER.—Page 132.

with wild, flowing gray hair, and eyes that burned like coals of fire. She fled from me."

"Twar a woman, den, Marse John?"

"Yes; and the most terrible spectacle I have ever seen; it makes me shudder to even think of her."

"An' I tink I see her afore me all de time."

"Uncle, you have met her, then?" I ask, surprised. He drops his head, and works on the silver plate with renewed energy.

"Yas; I seed her in de grave-yard de oder day. I was cuttin' de grass around de graves in de plot for de last time dis year, nebber dreamin' how soon we'd be puttin' de good ole marse at rest dar, wen I seed her. She runned away from me, too; but I was done skeered half to def fust."

I am under the solemn conviction that the old fellow is constructing this story as he goes along, but fail to see his motive, and hence allow the matter to rest.

"If I were you, Uncle, I would take a hammer and nails and fasten up that door."

"Dey'll wanter use it to-morrow if dey has de funeral. De marse allers said he meant to be carried trough dat gate wen his time come, an' I reckon dat am now."

"Well, you could nail it temporarily, and draw the nails to-morrow. That fearful creature might take a notion to come in here—if she has not

done so before now," I add, as a sudden thought flashes into my brain with the startling effect of an electric flash.

I cannot stop to analyze it now—that will come later, when I have more time; but it puts an idea into my head which must gradually work much as yeast does, until the whole mass becomes leavened.

"I'll do it, Marse John. Can't 'ford to hab any more mischief done yer, no how;" and he shakes his head sadly, as he glances in the direction of the house.

"For one, I wouldn't like to live in the neighborhood of an asylum—seems to me it must be dangerous at times. Have you ever known a lunatic to escape before?"

"A what, Marse John?"

"Lunatic—crazy person, like this creature."

'I beliebe dar was one dat got away and made a rumpus in de wicinity; but dat war a great while ago—years an' years."

"Your memory is good, Uncle?'

"Remarkably, sah."

"Was that other person a female, too?"

"'Twar, Marse John."

"They seem to be keener than the men."

"Dey's sharper dan de debble; dar ain't a soul on yarth dat kin ekal 'em. I'd sooner trust my-

self in a cage wif tigers dan in de hands ob sech critters," he asserts positively.

"Why, Uncle Jethro, one would think, from what you say, that you had had experience with crazy people," I cannot help remarking.

The old fellow moves uneasily, looks at me kind of appealingly, and then replies:

"Well, I has had a little in my time, Marse John—I knows wat dey is, anyhow, an' what cunnin' debbles dey are. I don't hanker arter any furder experience, neither," with a shake of the head that would have been ludicrous at another time.

"Uncle, you have been with Mr. Cartaret a long time—he would have trusted you with nearly anything he had, I presume?"

This quite tickles the old man. It is not a hard task to get what you want out of him, after all—a little diplomacy, and the thing is accomplished.

"Dat am a fack; de ole marse him tink I no fool. He nebber would a been afraid to put his pocket-book in my hand and tell me to buy whatebber war needed for de house—ebbery penny be 'counted for, shuah."

"I suppose the old gentleman took you into his secrets, too, Uncle?"

His appearance at that instant causes me to think of a turtle drawing in its head at the ap-

proach of danger. I could not express my meaning better than by such a simile.

"Secrets! De ole marse he no great hand foah secrets. He fond ob open-handed ways—an' young marse like him, too."

"Nevertheless, I'll wager Luther Cartaret had at least one secret from the world—everyone does. There was that affair of his second wife—everybody don't know the truth of that."

"No, dey don't, I 'spect."

"What do the people here believe?"

"You mean de ole people wat knowed her? Dey beliebe she started to go to her mudder, who was sick across de big sea, adn dat de vessel war lost, and Missy Rachel wid her, foah she war nebber heard ob agin."

"Uncle, did you see her die?"

"No, sah."

"Then, how do you know she is dead?"

"Marse tell me," doggedly.

"Did he say how she died?"

"I done tole you once, Marse John, dat we heered dat she jump in de ribber arter dat Cap'n Lancewood leab her, an' war drowned. De ole marse he go on to see de body."

"It is not buried yonder?" pointing in the direction of the cemetery.

"Oh, no—dat nebber do! de ole marse know

too much foah dat. How kin he say she drown on de sea, if he berry her dar?"

"Then, he knew where she was buried?"

"I 'spect so, Marse John, seein' dat he went away to hab it done secret-like."

"Do you know where it was she was drowned?"

"Not 'zactly; somewhar in York State—seems to me 'twas like Watson's Den."

"Ah! yes—Watkin's Glen; a fitting place for a suicide, according to my notion."

Uncle looks a trifle alarmed, I think; he acts much like a crab retreating backward, now.

"Don't know, Marse John—sounds alike dat ar, but might be mistaken. Anyhow, she was drowned, an' marse allers say so," stubbornly.

"You know the man who came here to look up this affair, Uncle?" I continue.

"Yas, de man wid de black face—I think he got Spanish blood in him, or else Indian."

"Just as like that last, which would account for his loving to track people down."

"Am dat wat he do, Marse John?"

"It is his business—a detective. Suppose, for instance, he thought circumstances pointed to you as the guilty party—the one who had crept into the library and used that deadly knife—he would begin to hunt around to find out, first, the motive for the deed, and then how it was done."

"I 'clar to goodness, you skeer me," he mutters

uneasily, looking around as though he half expects to see the dreaded detective near by, waiting to clap his hand upon his shoulder.

Of course no such apparition meets his gaze; and somewhat reassured, he listens again. It is my purpose to alarm the old man all I can, and thus have him ripe for my *coup de grace* whenever I want to play that last stroke.

"Looking for a motive, he might possibly find that at some time the old master had struck you in anger, and that you had sworn revenge; or he might learn that you had an itching palm for money, and Luther Cartaret had a large sum with him that night. In short, Uncle, any one of a dozen things might be discovered that would give you away if you were guilty; and when he had satisfied himself that you were guilty, he would begin to cast around him for the means employed. Thus, step by step he would trace your actions, until the whole story was laid bare, after which he would arrest you, clap a pair of irons about your wrists, and take you away to jail, after which you would be tried, found guilty on the evidence he brought forward, and sentenced to be hung by the neck before spring."

Poor old uncle's face is a study: the perspiration stands in beads upon his brow under the gray wool; but it is inward emotion, mental

agony, that brings this out, and not the exertion he is displaying in rubbing up the harness.

His eyes, too, are round as silver dollars, and show the whites. Altogether, Jethro is alarmed, and he shows it in his looks.

"Honey, you don't tink dat man look my way, do you?" he asks, huskily.

"He hasn't been to talk with you yet, Uncle?"

"No, sah."

"Then, as yet he doesn't suspect you; but he is bound to put this crime on someone, and if he fails to get the guilty party, he may turn to you; there's no telling."

"Den he make a big mistake. I don't know nuffin' about de matter, cep'y dat I lose de best ole marse wat ebber lib," he says, sullenly.

I think I will put him to the test now by telling how Tom is in the toils; surely he cannot hold his secret longer when he hears that.

"Uncle, I've got something—" I begin, when I see him look behind me in alarm.

"Gorry!" he mutters, with a groan, "I spect your words am gwine to be a prophecy, Marse John, for hyar comes dat detection ossifer now, an' I kin feel de terror ob de law away off hyar."

That settles it for the present. I will defer my *coup de grace* for some time in the near future, and, to deceive Smithers, ask old uncle some ordinary question, which he answers readily.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CHEMIST

Smithers comes up.

He looks at me with a twinkle in his eye, as though amused at the manner in which I am working my case.

No doubt he believes old uncle is ready to make up a yarn that will astonish me, and give me reason to think I am on the right trail.

"How are you getting on, Mr. Peters?" he asks, in a quizzical tone.

I am trembling for fear lest he may turn his heavy guns upon Jethro, and force his secret out before my very eyes, but hope he will have too much respect for me to do that. This is my game, and by rights he has no business meddling with it.

"Not as well as I could wish, sir; I find myself in something of a tangle already," I reply.

"Ah! when you want the tough knots taken out, my dear fellow, come to me," he says, with the most exasperating condescension.

At the same time he begins moving off—a fact I hail with sincere pleasure.

"I will do so if they get too intricate for my comprehension," I reply.

Then he suddenly stops and turns.

"Are you thinking of going into the city again, Mr. Peters?" he asks.

I cannot keep from starting; it seems to me he must know my secret, for it was my intention to make for New York as soon as Tom placed the small package in my hands.

"I might run in this evening. Is there anything I can do for you, sir?"

"Yes; mail this letter. It would not leave here until morning, and perhaps not then. I have a very poor opinion of these country post-offices."

"I will put it in with pleasure."

"No more Philip Gautier visits, my friend?" with something of a suspicious glance.

"Oh, no! He's many miles out upon the ocean by this time."

Then he walks off, to turn again and call out:

"Coming back to-night, Peters?"

"Yes, if the time-table admits of it, and I can bribe Uncle Jethro to wait for me at the station."

With that he leaves me in peace.

My mind is on the work ahead. As I place the letter in my pocket, I see it is directed to the chief of police. No doubt it contains the record of the day's work, written up by Smithers, and I

shrug my shoulders as I think how heavily his report must bear upon Tom Cartaret's wife.

Then my mind goes back to the subject which I was about to introduce when the coming of the detective bothered me. Can I get the old man to confess the truth?

At any rate, I believe I can try, and there will be no harm in the effort, as I am resolved to keep within bounds, and only speak concerning what might be the case.

If he believes that his dearly beloved young master is in peril of his life, Jethro will feel inclined to tell all he knows; that is my estimate of his character, and, as I have said before, I rather pride myself in my ability to read faces.

Again am I interrupted. Just as I begin to train my batteries on the darky, and when I am certain that I have at least aroused his curiosity, if not his fears, I hear a firm tread near by, and turning, see someone coming. It is Tom himself. In his hand he carries a small package, and I can guess what it contains: he has secured the skirt, and is seeking me. Well, that settles it—for the present I will have to defer my plan of operations.

"I was looking for you, John. Uncle, hitch up Dexter in the dog-cart, and take Mr. Peters to the station; you have just time to make it."

"Yes, sah;" and without another word, Uncle

Jethro bundles his harness into the big barn and proceeds to obey orders.

"You can just catch the 5:50 express, John. That will land you in the city in time for supper, after which you can see your chemist friend, and come out again. There is a train every hour up to midnight—here is a time-table. You will pardon my rushing you like this, but I tell you I cannot sleep until I know the worst, and the sooner it is over the better."

"My dear fellow, this just suits me; I like to do things on the jump. Nothing could be better. I will return to-night, unless something quite out of the common run detains me. Could I wire you if it were necessary?"

"Yes. They don't deliver messages at night here as a general rule, but you can see the operator, and let him know that uncle will be there; he will hand him the telegram."

"Good! I'll do it. You understand that I'm only preparing for emergencies, Tom. I expect to be on deck here between nine and ten to-night."

"Heaven grant that success attend you, John! I shall not have you out of my mind."

"I'll do all I can."

"I know it. A man never had a better friend than I have in you, John Peters."

"Nonsense, Tom. This is really in my line of business. You know we were like brothers.

Then, again, there is a satisfaction to me in the mere hope and anticipation of causing Smithers humiliation. Something about the man repels me—he is so confident of succeeding."

"I would give all I own, or ever expect to own, if you could beat him at his game; but my hopes are not very strong, John. It makes me shudder when I think of the awful accumulation of evidence against Madge."

Of course, I try to cheer him up, and in a measure succeed; but my assurances are only half-hearted ones, for I cannot see very great brightness ahead myself, so heavy are the clouds. Then uncle comes into view with the dog-cart, and I jump in.

A grasp of the hand, a few earnest words, and I am off for the 5:50.

Dexter makes good time, and as we arrive a few minutes ahead of the schedule, I go in to speak to the telegraph operator about a possible message, telling him that uncle will be on hand from nine up to midnight to take it, and leaving a dollar bill to pay him for sitting up.

All is now arranged. As the train draws up I step aboard, and am whirled away from Clifton, bound once more for the great city.

Evening has already set in, and the lamps are lighted on the train. I lie back, and shape my plan of actions, consult the time-table, and ar-

range things generally. It is easy to do this, though just as likely as not some unexpected hitch may occur in the programme to throw things crooked. When I review the case, and look at it from all points of the compass, I see only one little gleam of hope, and that is really so small that I hardly dare expect much from it; but it is strange how a drowning man will clutch at a straw.

At last we arrive, and cross the river on the ferry. One of my first moves is to deposit the detective's letter in the post-office, going out of my way a little to do it. Then I seek a restaurant, and have a light supper.

It is now a quarter past seven. If I find my friend the chemist in, everything will be lovely, and I can count on fortune as attending my case. Much depends on this, and I shall be anxious until I know.

An idea has entered my head which I am desirous of carrying out, and in order to do it I must be back at the Cartaret manse before midnight arrives.

It is a clear night, and the moon will soon be climbing up the eastern heavens, dispensing with a bountiful hand her flood of silvery light. Beautiful weather, this, for November! How I long to be in the woods up in wild Pike county, gun in hand, looking for game. I can see the

cheery camp-fire now, with Tom bending over it, while the owls awake the echoes of the woods, or perhaps the distant scream of a bob-cat thrills the nerves.

My disappointment is keen. Tom will not be able to go with me as planned, and I will have to make a solitary pilgrimage this time. To one who loves good company this is pretty hard.

Having finished my supper, I hie away to the office and rooms of my friend without loss of time. He is in the employ of a large concern making food-products, such as baking-powder. Part of the time he is in their great building, where he has an office, but he also has some of his work to do at home, and hence I have no doubt will have all the materials for making a chemical examination of the stain near by.

I reach his house, and am just about to pass up the steps when the door opens. Naturally, I step aside to make way for the party coming out, and no sooner do I see who it is than I shrink into the darkest shadow.

Smithers!

It seems like the irony of fate to see him here, and I begin to feel that I have in some way been outwitted by the detective.

How this could be done does not as yet enter into my head, but the sight of Smithers seems to prophesy evil.

It flashes into my mind that during one of our talks in the afternoon he asked me a simple question with reference to a good chemist—his words were put in such a way that I never once had a suspicion that he wanted to make use of the services of such a party at once.

He comes down the steps, and walks rapidly away, probably making for the eight o'clock train, for I am sure he does not intend to leave Clifton even for a night.

I wait until he has gone some distance, and then, mounting the steps, I ring.

My curiosity is aroused—I wonder what brings Smithers here. Something connected with the case, I am sure, and yet it is hard to see what it can be, since I hold in my hand the dress that is stained.

There is no need of bothering my brain much about it; I can soon discover all, if my friend is willing to speak, and I know the professor well enough to believe that he will yield to my entreaties.

Perhaps the chance is about to be given me to once more secure a lead on the detective, and the thought makes me chuckle with pleasure.

The door opens; a maid stands there. I ask for the professor, and hear that he has given orders that he cannot be seen again that night, as he has a difficult analysis to perform in con-

nection with some great lawsuit in which his company has become engaged.

Nothing daunted, I scribble a line on the back of my card, and send it in. As I expected, it proves the magic "open sesame," for when the maid appears again she smiles and says:

"The professor will see you, sir."

"In his office?"

"Yes, sir; do ye know the way?"

"I should think so."

Advancing along the hall, I reach a door, and without ceremony open it. Before me lies the professor's "den"—and such a sight as it is! with hundreds of bottles, scales, retorts, and all manner of modern and ancient chemical implements used in determining the ingredients in any compound. A curious business for a man to carry on, and yet one full of fascination. I have known Professor Jacks some years, and have long since been assured that he is alive only in his peculiar calling, wrapped up in it, so to speak. He would rather wrestle with a difficult problem in chemistry, and wring a victory out of it, than to hear the greatest singer alive. There is no accounting for tastes in this world of ours. He is always experimenting, too, and I have jokingly told him more than once that he ought to find a way to make pure gold out of the baser metals. Professor Jacks is, perhaps, what might be called

a "crank;" but he is an interesting man—I like him, and have spent many delightful hours in his company, watching his peculiar experiments.

CHAPTER XVII

ANOTHER POINT GAINED

Professor Jacks advances to meet me, his hand extended. I know the clutch that awaits me, and adroitly manage to get the better hold, so I can give as good as I receive.

He is a thin man, with a face badly scarred—the marks of certain dangerous experiments in the past, whereby he gained knowledge and almost lost his own life; but the small eyes have a power peculiarly their own—a quiet man, disdaining all show, but I know the treasures that are stored in his mind, for I have benefited by them from time to time.

"This is a pleasure, John. When you want to see me on business, it must mean something," he says heartily, and at the same time getting his work in on my hand, while I reciprocate.

"The girl said you were busy, professor?"

"So I am, very; but I can always lay aside the cares of life to see you briefly."

"Can you give me a quarter of an hour, or at the most a half?" I ask.

"Readily."

Satisfied, I sit down, and Jacks does the same. I notice that he glances at my package as though curious to know what I have in it, for I have begun to unfasten the cord.

Before I disclose the contents, however, I have a few questions to ask the professor.

"You had a visitor before me—I saw him coming out of the house?"

"Yes," quietly.

"Mr. Smithers?"

"Ah! you know him?"

"I should think so. It is partly on his account I am here."

"Indeed!"

'Professor, don't think I am curious; but it was I who referred that man to you, and I am anxious to know what his business was."

He hesitates a moment.

"You know he is a detective?"

"Yes," I reply.

"His business is a secret one; perhaps I would hardly be doing the right thing to tell it. Like a doctor, I regard many of the communications I receive as confidential."

"Perhaps I could give a guess."

There is only one possible solution of the mystery in my mind—I can conceive of no other reason why Smithers should seek the presence of the professor.

"He did not bring anything for you to examine?"

"True."

"But asked your opinion, on the contrary, as to how he was to determine the nature of a certain substance that had been spilled on a dress?"

The professor's eyebrows rise, indicating his surprise, and I know that I am on the right track.

"Well, you seem to know his business pretty well—how is this?" he asks.

"Because I am on the same line myself."

"He's got the start of you—I supplied him with information and chemicals, and he has gone to look into the matter."

At this I laugh.

"Professor, when you set a lawyer against a detective, look out for fun. I may have taken too long at my supper to get here first, but for all that I think I have the bulge on our mutual friend. He has the chemicals and knowledge, but, as you see, I have the garment itself."

With that I open the packet and shake out the fleecy cream-colored skirt worn by Tom's wife, and which he has put into my hands for the very purpose to which I am applying it.

The professor smiles.

"I give you credit for your shrewdness, John, and will back you to succeed."

"Go slow, professor. The man I am dealing

with is no chicken. He has a fertile brain, but the trouble with him now is just this: He is so confident of a certain thing that one cannot convince him otherwise—in his eyes, all roads lead to Rome. On my part, I don't want to believe as he does, and therefore I can see other things."

Then I point out the stain to him.

"Tell me about it while I work," he says.

"How long will it take you?"

"In ten minutes I think I will be able to tell you what caused that stain."

While he commences operations I proceed to tell him as much of the case as he will care to hear, and of course he is interested—who could help it when a fair woman is placed in a position of deadly peril?

As I talk I watch him.

He has gathered the hem of the skirt, and immersed it in a little bowl containing some liquid, which I do not believe is water, for the action is too speedy.

Moving it gently around for a few minutes, he finally shows me that every particle of color has been removed—the skirt is as clean as ever, and he rinses the wet portion under a faucet, after which he gives me the skirt to roll up again in a bundle when I choose.

I talk on—he works.

One instrument after another he drops into the

liquid, little glass tubes containing liquor and all manner of strange contrivances—I know he is testing to discover what ingredients there are in the colored fluid in the bowl.

My curiosity would be aroused, under ordinary circumstances; and considering what an interest I have in the matter, it may be readily understood that I watch him closely.

He is as grave as though the fate of nations depended on his work, and I find myself utterly unable to read his thoughts.

Finally I finish my story.

The ten minutes are almost up, and if he keeps his word I will soon know all.

He pours the tested liquor into a phial, writes some hieroglyphics upon the label, and then turns to me with a smile.

"Your story is most interesting, John, and you know, without my saying it, that my sympathy is with your side. I sincerely hope you may be able to prove the lady innocent."

"Do you give me hope of this?" I ask, eagerly.

"There is nothing here to criminate her."

"Then, the stain—"

"Was not made by human blood."

I draw a breath of relief.

"What was it, then?"

"Iron rust, caused in the washing. You see, I

have taken it out without hurting the fabric—which is a secret of my own."

"Professor, one more favor."

"Name it, my boy," kindly.

"Will you put this in the shape of a formal document, to the effect that the stain was as you found it, and so on?"

"Willingly. See, I have blanks for just such a purpose. Let me also privately mark that dress before you wrap it up, so I can swear to it again, if it becomes necessary."

I watch him filling out the blank with a real pleasure, such as I have not known for quite a long time. Mr. Smithers will no doubt be astonished when he finds that his chemicals will be of no avail, since the stain has been removed and analyzed.

"Wasn't that a dark mark for iron rust?" I ask the professor; at which he smiles.

"The lady endeavored to remove it with a preparation, and although it disappeared while wet, no sooner had it dried than it came back almost as dark as a blood stain could be. My discovery will be a boon to humanity, I presume. There, read that over, and I'll sign it."

The document is framed to cover every legal view of the case, and I cannot see how it could be bettered. When I tell him this, he puts his name to it, with his private stamp.

"Success to you, friend John. Let me hear how the affair comes out, you know;" and as I take his hand again in leaving, I feel that the professor is one among a thousand, always ready to do a friend a favor.

I leave him to go at his serious business, and soon find myself on the street again. It is about eight o'clock, and while I am too late for one train, I have an hour to wait for the next.

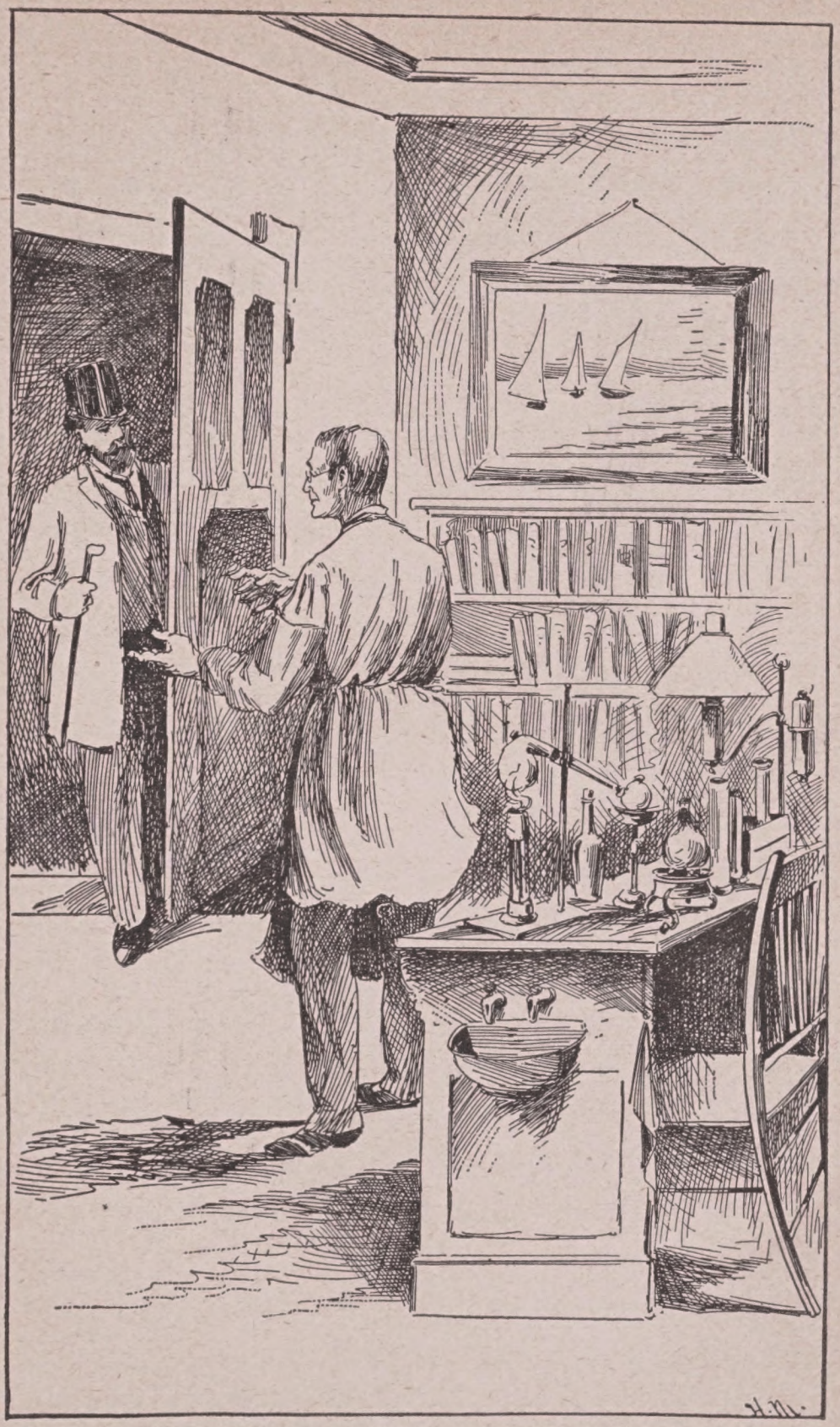
This is unfortunate, for I would much rather be at Tom's place—there are so many things to be done before morning, if we expect to be able to clear up the great mystery before the coroner's jury begins the inquest.

I walk down Broadway for amusement.

The moon is already up, but not high enough to discourage the electric lights. As the evening is a lovely one, many people are promenading at this hour.

It is a treat to a born New-Yorker to even remember Broadway, when away from home, and as a bachelor I am very fond of the portion between Madison and Union Squares. I know a great many people to be seen there in the afternoon of a pleasant day—actors, lawyers, men of letters, and rich young chaps whose greatest desire in life is to cultivate these people, no matter what the cost to themselves.

While I wander down the street, keeping an



I INTERVIEW PROFESSOR JACKS.—Page 156.

eye on the time, as I do not mean to get left, I see several people I know, but stop to talk with none, for my time is too precious.

Finally I board a car, and am soon spinning along in the direction of the Battery, at a speed only attained by Broadway drivers.

The ferry-boat takes me across the broad river, and I delight in standing outside and looking upon the myriad of lights that mark the two cities, with the brighter gleam ahead where the slip lies for which we aim.

A weary wait, and at length we are off. I am by this time growing rather accustomed to the trip, having made it now three times inside of fifteen hours.

On the way my thoughts cannot be kept off the case—I feel that this night is bound to be fraught with still more singular events than have characterized the day, and can only sincerely hope that the vague dreams in which I have indulged may come true. Whether I have anything more substantial than faith upon which to build my plans, the near future will prove.

It is always tiresome to me traveling by night; true, the moon shines from an unclouded sky, but one can see little of scenery by moonlight. A water scene looks picturesque enough, but at a short distance a stump may easily be taken for a cow.

I prepare, then, to settle back, and take things easy for the trip of nearly an hour.

Of course, old uncle will be waiting for me, so I have no fears of being compelled to walk at the other end of my railroad journey.

I have entered the smoker, so that I may enjoy my cigar, and take it easy. A few others have come in from time to time, but I hardly notice them, my thoughts being busy elsewhere.

How would this strange case come out? Would I be able to ward off the blow that threatens the fortunes of Tom Cartaret, and save his young wife from despair?

I realize as never before what a big task I have undertaken, and yet I am not daunted. "As long as there's life there's hope" and a lawyer can find about as much encouragement in this old saying as a physician.

While I lie back on the cushions, with my hat drawn over my eyes to shield them from the light, I am conscious that someone has settled down in the seat beside me. Curiosity causes me to raise my head in order to glance at this person, for there are plenty of empty seats, when my eyes rest upon—Smithers!

CHAPTER XVIII

A TRAP FOR THE SLEEP-WALKER

I am not greatly surprised. True, I believed Smithers had departed on the eight o'clock train; but, for some reason or other, he has seen fit to wait over for the next one.

He eyes me curiously.

"My dear Peters, it seems to me you are fond of railroading, or trying to use up a commuter's ticket that is near its end. Three times in one day is drawing it rather heavy."

His tone bristles with interrogation-points, but I am in no hurry to let him know what I have been at. Having gained an advantage, I am desirous of enjoying it. Perhaps, at some time in the near future, he may have me in a similar hole, and I misjudge his nature if he does not give me the full benefit.

"Business necessitates a trip; it is not a matter of choice," I reply, quietly.

"Ah! another Gautier?"

"Not this time. By the way, I put your letter in the post-office. Strange that you made me a mail-carrier when you came yourself."

He laughs.

"Didn't dream of it at the time. Notion came to me suddenly—started to walk—met a wagon on the way—saw you pass me, and **was sorry** I did not call out—almost missed the train, and just jumped on while it was on the move. All the same, I'm obliged to you."

"Don't mention it. I suppose you reported the affair in person, so the letter will be stale news."

"No, I did not go near headquarters. That could keep easily enough. I had other fish to fry," looking at me significantly.

"I don't suppose you were near Twenty-third street?" I ask maliciously, and enjoy his look of genuine surprise.

"Yes, I was in that quarter."

"You found him a fine gentleman?"

"Whom do you mean?"

"Jacks."

He chuckles at this.

"You lawyers are sharp at cross-questions. Of course, you can guess what took me to the professor's den?"

I point to a little package he holds.

"That is the fruit of it, I presume."

"Yes; chemicals to discover what the nature of that dark stain on the dress of Tom Cartaret's wife may be."

My time has come at last!

"Mr. Smithers, I can save you much trouble in this affair," I say, soberly.

"In what way?"

"You cannot, by the aid of any chemicals, discover the nature of that stain on the dress."

"That's your idea only. We'll see what we'll see. Meanwhile, perhaps you might not object to telling me why I will fail with this infallible means?"

"Certainly; because there is now no stain upon the hem of that dress."

Smithers looks at me and scowls—his face can appear very ugly when in this mood.

"See here! have you been meddling in this matter? If you have destroyed evidence—"

"I know the value of evidence too well to destroy it. I have simply anticipated your move, sir. That bundle up in the rack contains the dress—Professor Jacks has made a chemical analysis of the stain, and there is his report."

Saying which, I hand the astounded Smithers the document, which he reads with avidity.

"Iron rust, eh? That settles the case so far as the stain is concerned. I must compliment you, Mr. Peters, on your acumen; but you must not imagine the matter is ended. There may be one the less proof against the lady, but you must admit that the affair looks black for her."

I acknowledge this fact, and yet I am not so discouraged as my face might declare. Success thus far has served to increase my zeal, and I am gaining confidence in my plans. Perhaps, after all, what Smithers remarked with reference to my abilities as a detective may turn out to be true.

"I did not dream that you meant to go to the city on the same business, Mr. Smithers, but when I saw you come out of the professor's house, I jumped at conclusions. The rest I learned from him, though he was reluctant about disclosing professional secrets, and it was only after I had shown him how close my suspicions were that he talked."

"This is number two," he says, grimly. "If you can dispose of a few more points with the same success, John Peters, you will win."

That is the first time he has even breathed a word with reference to the possibility of my final triumph, and it raises new hopes. At any rate, I have succeeded in arousing the respect of this shrewd detective.

It is not so very strange, after all. I have seen an expert and a novice play a game, and the new beginner, with luck back of him, rout his antagonist. Such things frequently happen in everyone's experience.

Just now fortune favors me, and yet in another

game I might stand no show at all. I am wise enough to know this, and do not delude myself with vain conceits.

"How are you going to get back?—will the old nigger be waiting?" asked Smithers.

"I expect him to—he had his orders."

"From Tom?"

"Yes."

"Then, he knows of your visit?"

"Certainly."

"And its object?"

"It was Tom who brought me the dress."

Smithers shakes his head a trifle—that is his way when thinking.

"Two against one, eh? Well, I rather think I have the advantage of you yet. Although it would hurt my professional pride should such a thing happen, I can truly say, Mr. Peters, that I hope you will succeed, for the sake of Tom Cartaret and his young wife."

Words count but little with me. Looking at the detective, I am constrained to believe, however, that he speaks the truth. There is little of sentiment in him, but that small portion has been aroused in this case. Perhaps the beauty of Tom's wife has slightly bewitched this man of the world. Even the jury in the box and the judge on the bench are affected by a beautiful woman—it may be insensibly, but true all the

same. At the same time, this man has grown so accustomed to dealing with dashing adventuresses and confidence women, perhaps, that he will not hesitate about applying the crucial tests of the law when the proper time comes.

"Mr. Smithers, you told me that in all probability the inquest would be carried out in the morning—before or after the burial?" I say, desirous of leading the conversation in a certain channel.

"Correct."

"Do you think it can be arranged so that we might close the case before the inquest, and thus present the true facts to the jurors?"

"So far as I am concerned, sir, I am ready to close the case at any time."

I feel uneasy at his answer.

"I understand what you mean—your case is so positive that you can rest on your oars. Then, you have delayed this foreclosure—'

"Partly in deference to you, and, again, because I half expected something to turn up. That something has not yet happened, and, as I said, I am ready to call the case at any time."

"Give me as long as you can."

"Willingly. You have some plan, Mr. Peters?"

"Yes; but you may call it a wild hope."

"Nevertheless, if you are so minded, I would like to hear what it is."

"MR. SMITHERS, HAVE YOU EVER KNOWN A SOMNAMBULIST BEFORE."—Page 169.

He shows curiosity, and that in itself gratifies my natural vanity—I am human, though a lawyer.

"Well, as we have more than half an hour on this accommodation train before reaching the station at Clifton, and as this subject is uppermost in our minds, I don't mind telling you my plan—perhaps you will laugh at it, and, again, you may see some merit in it."

He settles himself comfortably, and prepares to listen, while I puff at my cigar a moment, as if to collect my thoughts.

"Mr. Smithers, have you ever known a somnambulist before?"

"I have not."

"Did you ever make a study of the peculiarities of the disease—for it is that?"

"No, sir," he replies.

"Then, you have missed strange reading. On my part, I have read some things of an extraordinary nature connected with sleep-walking, all authenticated, and I am ready to believe almost anything that can be said."

"I understand that people do singular things when thus afflicted; but it is too much for me to swallow when you declare that Tom Cartaret's wife committed this murder in her sleep, and knows nothing of her guilt. Not that the thing is impossible—goodness knows, I've met with

facts just as singular; but it is out of the range of probabilities."

"I do not care to discuss that just now, my dear fellow. The future will prove which of us is right. What I want to do is to impress on your mind some of the odd things that have come to me in connection with somnambulism."

"Ah! I am ready to grasp them."

"What impressed me the most in this matter was one singular thing: When a person addicted to this singular malady of sleep-walking does a thing on one night, he or she is almost certain to repeat it on the succeeding night at the same hour, provided all is well."

He shows sudden interest.

"I'm catching your idea; proceed."

"For instance, a certain young girl was seen to cross a dangerous foot-bridge in the moonlight, at midnight, and they found she was walking in her sleep. Watching her, they found she repeated the performance every night. It was learned that from this point she had watched her lover go in a boat out to his ship. Other cases are similar; one in particular has a bearing upon this matter—let me briefly narrate it. An old miser was robbed; he called in the aid of a detective; they suspected the nephew of the miser—had him tracked, but to no avail. Finally the detectives got a clue and watched the old man

in his sleep; saw him get up, go to where the empty box had replaced the one that contained his treasure, take it, and, proceeding to the cellar, dig a hole. Then the detective discovered that the old man was doing it all in his sleep. He dared not awaken him then, for fear of disastrous consequences, but in the morning he told the miser all. Eagerly they went below, and, digging, found both boxes."

The detective shuts one eye reflectively.

"By Jove, Mr. Peters! perhaps you have hit on an excellent scheme, by means of which the truth may be ascertained—provided, of course, the ghost will walk."

"I take the chances of that."

"You think, then—"

"That if we secrete ourselves in the library of the house between the hours of midnight and one, we may witness something that will give us satisfaction, at least, and one of us a surprise."

"That's easily done," he says, readily.

"Then, shall we call it a bargain?"

"Assuredly; and if it is a success, I stand ready to give you the praise, Mr. Peters. On the whole, no harm can be done, and, as you say, there is a chance of your learning the positive truth."

"Then, that point is settled. At midnight,

meet me at the library door, and we will decide as to the best hiding-place."

Mr. Smithers smiles and nods. He does not once suspect, I am sure, the covert design I have in view, and doubtless believes that if there is any surprise, it will be on me. He forgets I am a lawyer, and that you seldom catch a weasel asleep.

CHAPTER XIX

ON THE SCENE OF ACTION AGAIN

So far, I have had no reason to regret the company of Mr. Smithers—in fact, I am rather glad he has waited for the nine o'clock accommodation, since it has given us the opportunity to converse.

Once or twice I have found myself wondering what it could have been that kept him so long, and whether he had learned in some way that I meant to take that train.

He knew I was in the city, and that I would in all likelihood go out that night; so it seemed as though he might have concluded to wait over a train for the sake of my company and the assistance to be received at Clifton.

I have decided this matter, and am not worrying my head about it at all, when the detective knocks the whole theory over with a few words.

"Since you saw me leave the house of the professor I have been through quite a little experience, my dear Peters," he remarks.

"How was that?"

He shows me his right hand. The knuckles are certainly bruised, as though they have come in

contact with some hard substance. I immediately imagine Smithers has been in a fight.

"Where did you get that?" I ask.

"It's quite a little story, and has a connection with this case we are working on. Would you like to hear it?"

Of course I signify my assent. Consulting my watch, I find that we have at least twenty minutes before Clifton station is reached, and I am at all times ready to hear a good story; besides, Smithers has said it has some bearing on the case in point.

So I settle back in my corner of the seat, and take things as easy as I can while he talks.

"While looking around the grounds at the Cartaret place, I came upon the foot-prints you laid such stress on—at least, I presume they were the same. Curiosity caused me to bend down and examine them, and I noticed one peculiar thing in connection with the same: the sole of one shoe had been patched, so that the line of division between the old and the new ran diagonally across. Such a thing makes a fine clue to follow, and it was especially interesting to me, because I remembered seeing such a shoe within the last few days. At first I could not place it, but after a while it all came suddenly to me, and I remembered that the man who wore the patched shoe was a notorious crook—a man known as Joe

the Fox. When I found I had time on my hands—more than an hour, if I wanted to catch the train you intended coming out on—the idea arose that I might as well look up this fellow. I hadn't much idea that he would prove a success, but the main thought, I own, was to steal a little of your thunder, you understand."

I nod my head, being already interested.

"Well, I left my package in a drug store where I could call for it again, and then set out for the place where the Fox might be found. It is my business to know where such men congregate, you understand. When a job has been done, I examine everything carefully, and generally I am able, from the finger-marks about it, to decide who the author is, and then where to find him. Hence, in a short time I am in the unsavory neighborhood where the Fox holds forth—a region known locally as the Beefsteak. The Fox is a member of the gang that flourishes here, a terror to the police, since its members are so numerous and bold. Luck was with me, and I soon got on the trail of the man I sought. After that it did not take me long to run him down. Of course, I didn't immediately tell him what I wanted, but pretended I was a rich gent in search of a man who would do a little job *sub rosa* for me, and be well paid for it. The Fox jumped eagerly at my bait—he was rather well

strapped, I saw, and needed money. Watching him, I also thought he was carrying some weighty secret around with him, for he seemed uneasy and nervous. I managed to get him away from the rest of his gang, and with several drinks partly stupefied his senses. Then I sprung my game, and this is the way I did it: Telling him a cock-and-bull story of an imaginary wrong I had suffered from a man, he asked me, naturally enough, who the party was against whom he was to be pitted. Watching his face closely, I mentioned the name of Luther Cartaret, of Clifton. He changed color, and looked at me.

"'Ain't that the cove that was killed?' he demanded.

"'Yes,' I replied; 'and you're the man that's going to be arrested for the killing.'

"At first he looked all knocked in a heap, and then he got mad.

"'What nonsense is this?' he asked.

"'You'll find it no nonsense unless you give an account of yourself for the last twenty-four hours. The proof against you is utterly overwhelming, even to the mark of your patched shoe in the garden soil. If you were not there, then where did you hold forth?'

"I had the man in a hole, and I saw it. He could not escape the charge of murder except by criminating himself another way, and hence he

found himself in a bad fix. In desperation, he at length declared that on the night before he had been one of the party that made the unsuccessful attack on the safe of the factory away over in Brooklyn. Thus, to prove an *alibi* on account of one crime, he found himself compelled to acknowledge another. I believed that what he said was true, but unfortunately I thought to scare the fellow a little, in order to pay myself for my trouble. He became alarmed, and, before I knew what he was up to, sprang at me like a tiger, believing that I meant to take him in on one charge or the other. Well, we had a hot little time of it, I tell you, though it lasted only a couple of minutes. I rather think I had the better of the bargain, for I gave the rascal several good blows, the result of which you see on my knuckles. By this time, however, several others of the gang thought it about time to take a part in the game, and as I didn't have my fighting rig on just then, I concluded it would pay me about as well to retreat. This I did skillfully, and although they hunted high and low for me, having learned from the Fox that I was a detective—and these fellows would rather thrash an officer than eat—they probably gave up the thing as a bad job. So you see my venture in your field was not much of a success, after all. The man was equal to a deed like this we are looking up, but he

didn't happen to be here last night. When such a rascal, to prove an *alibi*, criminates himself, you may know he is in earnest."

"You had quite a time of it. I know what those fellows are. Some years ago I used to go around with Jerry McAuley, and saw the worst side of New York life."

"Ah! Jerry was a queer character."

"You knew him, Smithers?"

"Well. He was a man such as I believe in—plain-spoken and honest. He never posed for a saint, but let everybody know that time was when he was the chief of sinners."

"He did a power of good at his mission."

"Yes. A score of such planted about the slums of Gotham would do more actual work in a year than all the churches of the city. The men who labor there are devoted to their work, and in sympathy with the masses."

So we converse on things in general while the train draws nearer Clifton. I am glad the detective has made a failure of his effort to discover the identity of the person who is responsible for the foot-prints in the garden. As he said, it was stealing my thunder anyway, for he did not believe in the theory.

He has been remarkably frank in acknowledging the facts, and I must say I admire real candor above all things.

At length the train slows down.

"Clifton!"

Mr. Smithers leads the way, and I follow, careful not to leave my package behind.

When we pass around the depot, I am pleased to find Uncle Jethro on hand. He has the same old family carriage that we used before.

Ere entering, I speak to the telegraph operator, and let him understand there is no need of keeping on the alert longer.

Then we start.

It is a very comfortable way of getting there, and I for one appreciate it, though I would have walked the mile rather than be left. Something tells me that my presence at the house is of the first importance on this night of nights

The moon, still almost full, shines from an unclouded sky, and calls forth many exclamations of delight from both of us. She has the appearance of a huge silver shield hung up in the heavens by invisible cords.

I do not remember ever having seen a night when the heavenly luminary shone more brightly, and somehow it seems to me an augury of success —at any rate, I take it as such, and my spirits rise in consequence.

We draw near the Cartaret grounds, and I rapidly sketch various little plans in my mind which I contemplate putting into effect.

When at length we arrive, I let Mr. Smithers get out first, for I mean to have a word or two with the old darky. To facilitate matters, I pretend to be searching for my package until I see that the detective has gone into the house, and then I find the bundle.

As I step out of the family coach, I say:

"Uncle!"

"Yes, sah."

"I'm coming out to see you after a while—I have some news for you. Don't go to bed until I come, will you?"

Even in the moonlight I can see his ebony features show surprise; but the old fellow replies:

"'Deed I won't, Marse John. What time kin I look for youse?"

"Between now and half past eleven—sometime inside of an hour."

"Berry good, sah. I'se on de watch, an' keep de camp-fires burnin';" and speaking to his fine horses, he drives toward the stables.

Looking after him, I wonder how my plan will come out. There is no indication as yet of what the result will be; but the few hours to follow must be heavily burdened with events bearing on the tragedy.

No sooner has the vehicle vanished under the shadows of the trees than an idea comes into my

head. I lay the package down on the veranda, and move away.

Perhaps it is a queer time for a stroll, but I want a few minutes more to collect my thoughts and frame my future action.

My stroll leads me in the direction of the wall lying between the Cartaret grounds and the cemetery. Presently I sight the gate or door in the wall through which the body of Luther Cartaret must be borne to its last resting-place ere another sunset.

Stepping up, I examine the door to see how old Jethro has secured it. The work is done in a bungling fashion, and it only requires one sturdy pull on my part to send flying the nail which he has driven, and the door opens.

I only look through, however, and then close it again, making no attempt to fasten it.

Then, turning on my heel, I walk quickly back in the direction of the house, ready for my interview with Tom, who must be growing anxious, for of course he heard the carriage return, and has seen nothing of me. Poor fellow! I am sure he has lived a year since I left him.

CHAPTER XX

"RACHEL BABETTE IS SURELY DEAD!"

It is just as I expected: Tom has grown so anxious that he cannot longer remain seated within, but has come out to see what has become of me. I meet him at the piazza.

"John, you are back again?" he says, quickly, holding out his hand, and I cannot fail to notice how feverish it is.

Even if everything comes out well, I have an idea that Tom will pass through a sick spell yet —his nerves have been drawn to their utmost tension, and something must soon give way.

"Yes, home again, Tom; and it's delightful to get out in this quiet nook after the fiendish clatter of Broadway," I exclaim.

"Will you come in?"

"Wouldn't you rather walk? The night is perfect—not too cool, and that moon is heavenly."

He shudders as I speak of it, and I know his mind instantly reverts to the preceding night, when he saw, in the white moonlight, his wife entering her room. That scene must always come before him when he looks upon the beauties of fair Luna.

"I presume it would be more pleasant outside than in, John."

So saying, he steps down off the piazza, and draws my arm in his.

"Come, lead the way—you are at home," I remark, anxious to clear the house before starting upon my theme.

Tom does not hesitate, but leads the way along a lovely walk. The trees hang over us, their branches soughing in the night wind, and scattering leaves upon the ground.

In places the moonlight peeps through, forming weird figures upon the walk; and passing along this romantic route, we head for a rustic seat that is to be found part way down the avenue.

"Now, tell me, what success did you have?" asks Tom, with quivering lips.

Glancing back, I see that we are far enough from the house to be beyond all danger of our conversation drifting thither. I am thinking of Smithers. True, he knows already all that I intend saying, but I do not care to have him listening.

"The best, Tom. I had the professor analyze the subject of the stain. First, he took it out of the garment entirely, and then experimented, finally declaring it was iron rust, the result, probably, of a rusty wash-boiler."

I hear Tom give a deep sigh, and feel his form

quiver. His relief is great, and I am already repaid for all my work.

"God bless you, John!" he murmurs.

To cover up his confusion, I begin to tell him how the professor arrived at this conclusion, and end by showing him the document that proves my story, which, of course, he cannot read there, but seems to take considerable satisfaction in handling.

"The most singular thing about it all, Tom, was the fact that I outwitted Smithers again."

"How was that?"

"He had been to the professor to secure certain chemicals to be used for determining the nature of a stain in a dress."

Tom is silent a moment, and then laughs.

"That is as good as luck. I reckon he'll be mortified when he finds—"

"Oh! he knows now. We came out on the same train, and I had the pleasure of letting him into the game."

"What did he say?"

"Took it in much better grace than I expected, and declared I was doing well."

"John, I have faith in you."

"Don't put too much, Tom, old fellow; wait awhile, until I have proved my title."

"Iron rust, and not blood—thank heaven for that, at least," he mutters.

"Don't build your hopes too high; that was only one of numerous points the detective has against your wife."

"I remember," sadly; "but it does me good to discover even a loop-hole. In other words, it looks to me as though events were shaping themselves in our favor."

"To entirely clear your wife, Tom, this awful thing must be placed on someone else."

"I know it."

"Suicide is utterly out of the question; all are agreed upon that point."

"It cannot be entertained; even to screen one I love better than my life, I will not put such a disgrace upon the dead. No; my father came to his death at the hands of an assassin, and in the interest of truth and justice, that party must be found, no matter at what cost."

He says this bravely, and I know what it costs him. If ever a hero lived, it is Tom just at this juncture, when he has every reason in the world to conceal the truth, and yet resists the natural inclination. Justice to the dead, as well as to the living, is his idea.

"Smithers heard me speak of some foot-prints in the grounds, and even examined them."

I go on and tell him the whole of the detective's adventure with Joe the Fox.

"Thus, you see, that clue falls to the ground. We must cast about us for new ones."

"It looks as though we were back where we started from," he says, gloomily.

"Oh, no! don't think that. Much has been accomplished; I believe we are on the home-run, and that the truth will soon appear."

He turns and looks at me.

"John, you are keeping something from me," he says, reproachfully.

"Well, you see—"

"That isn't fair. I am so deeply interested in this business that you should make me a confidant. Tell me all," he pleads.

"I have a little plan in view. I spoke of it to Smithers, and he commended it. Perhaps it may succeed; it is worth trying."

"Let me hear it."

So I introduced the subject of somnambulism, and relate the queer things I have read and known. Tom listens eagerly, and soon catches my idea, as I can readily see, although he does not interrupt me. Thus I finish.

"It may succeed," breathes Tom at my side.

He is not enthusiastic—why should he be? I have not taken him into my full confidence, and to his mind success simply means the fulfillment of our suspicion that his wife is unconsciously

guilty—that she has done the deed of murder in her sleep.

"Do you think it is a good idea?" I ask.

"Remarkably clever, John. I know something about sleep-walkers, and can affirm the facts you mention as true. Once a feat is performed, there is a likelihood that it will be repeated again and again. If Madge is guilty, she will go through the same actions when she walks again."

"Where is she now?"

"Asleep in her chair, just as on last night. I was astonished to find her there, but carefully abstained from arousing her."

"In that you were wise. At first it was not my intention to tell you about this; but I changed my mind. Then, I can count on your helping us to keep the vigil?"

"Aye, with all my heart. It is my own Madge who is under suspicion, and who but her Tom should be there if she awakens while in that room?"

"Truly, it is your place; that is why I thought best to tell you about it. I have some other things to talk about, Tom."

"Connected with this sad event? For I can hardly think of anything else."

"I don't blame you. Yes, they concern the actors in this tragedy. It is of your father I would speak now."

"Go on.

"He was a singular man, devoted to the memory of your mother, was he not?"

"Yes," with emphasis; "many hours a week did he spend at the grave in the cemetery. I know much of his finest work was done there. Even the terrors of a cemetery at night did not daunt him. Such a night as this I have known him to spend there."

"Let me see; didn't you once tell me, years ago, that he had met with some misfortune?"

A pause.

"Yes; I remember telling you."

"You did not give me the particulars, Tom, at the time; but it seems to me I can remember that a woman was at the bottom of it."

"You are right."

"She assailed your father, who held her as well as he could, and shouted for help. Fortunately, this was in the day-time; people came to his aid; the woman was driven away; I believe she was deranged."

"John, that is so; she was crazy, and would have killed father," slowly.

"Why should she?"

"You know the strange fancies of mad persons; they hate their best friends."

"She had no reason to look upon your father as her enemy, then?"

"No.'

"He had never injured her?"

"Never, John; on the contrary—" and here he stops before going further.

"Tom, don't hesitate; this may seem unimportant to you, but it has a bearing on the question. On the contrary—what?"

"He had been her best friend.'

"Tom, who was this woman?"

He does not answer, but moves uneasily.

"Was her name Rachel?" I continue.

"Yes."

"She was your father's second wife?"

"It is true."

"What year was it this happened?"

"When we were in college—our last year."

"1884?"

"Yes."

"Then, Tom, yonder slab in your father's lot, recording the death of Rachel, is a deceit—it speaks of her dying in '81."

"I know it."

"Uncle Jethro told me a story about her being drowned at Watkin's Glen, and your father having her buried in a local cemetery there."

"It proved to be an unknown woman. Rachel he found crazy at the same place. The idea occurred to him to bury the shame; so he declared it was Rachel who died. In reality, under

the name of Barbara Brown, she was committed to an asylum and kept there. She escaped at that time, and found out my father, and would doubtless have murdered him had not help come."

I confess to some little excitement, which I endeavor to conceal as much as possible. Here is what I have been reaching for; I trust it will not elude my grasp.

"Uncle Jethro knew all about it?" I ask.

"He was fully in father's confidence; in fact, I am sure he knows more about the matter than I do. But the old man is as close-mouthed as a clam; I am certain you cannot get him to disclose a word of what he knows."

On my part, I feel confident that I possess the magic means of opening the darky's mouth, and wrenching the truth from him as a dentist might a bad molar. There are ways of doing things beyond your ken, friend Tom; we of the law look deeper than the surface, and know how to play upon the emotions of men. Fear and love are great levers when properly handled.

"Tom, you can't fail to grasp my hope—the lone ray I have before me. What if it should turn out that Rachel had again escaped from the asylum, and this time finished the dreadful work she attempted before?"

I hold my breath while awaiting his reply. He shakes his head sadly; my heart sinks.

"I would it were so, John; but your theory is impossible—Rachel Babette is surely dead!"

HAPTER XXI

MEMORIES OF THE PAST

The steady assurance with which Tom Cartaret makes this assertion rather staggers me. I feel like a man who has, through patience, built up a castle, when someone knocks the underpinning away, and down falls the whole fabric in ruins.

If Rachel is dead, then is my theory without the keystone needed to form a perfect arch; it must, in all probability, collapse.

So I sit there for a full minute, among the ruins, pondering upon my subject. Tom makes no remark—he is also crushed; for, almost unknown to himself, he has been building on my hopes, and goes down with me.

A dozen things flash before me—strange, how wonderfully active the mind becomes in a sudden emergency like this! There is nothing in all the world equal to the speed of thought—electricity becomes tame in comparison. I remember the creature I have seen, within ten hours, hovering about the Cartaret plot in the quiet cemetery; I see the lying stone that tells of Rachel's demise in '81, when, in truth, that was the time she became dead to the world because the cold walls

of an asylum closed about her; and I notice how some vandal hand has endeavored to pound out the false inscription—can I believe it was any other than the crazy woman herself?

Tom says she is dead, this Rachel. Can he prove it?

To my mind, the proof must indeed be strong in order to convince me.

I rally a little, determined to make a fight still, before giving up.

"Tom, your words rather knock me out—I hardly know what to say. When did she die? how do you know she is dead?"

"Because I looked upon her body—it was buried with the other victims of the fire."

"Fire?"

"Just before I went to Europe, the asylum burned down. We received a telegram, and as father was not feeling well, I determined to go with him. The sight was terrible! A number of victims—all women—had been found, and their charred bodies were only recognizable through trinkets they may have worn, or other peculiarities. The sight was horrible!—it will never leave my memory. One poor wretch had been so burned that there was nothing left of her but the trunk, and upon this they found a watch, partly protected by her garments, in which was the name 'Rachel Babette.' I have it in the house now.

Father fainted at the sight, and I was kept busy attending him for twenty-four hours. Then I found that the remains had been buried with the rest, and we did not disturb them, letting the wretched creature rest."

"Do you know whether any of the poor creatures escaped from the asylum?"

He shakes his head.

"I never heard of any; father never mentioned the matter in his letters. He was a man of singular reserve. At any rate, John, that was almost two years ago. You can't conceive yourself of a poor, insane creature wandering around all that time without falling into the hands of the authorities. No, no; don't build any hopes on such a theory."

I am a little put out at Tom's manner; he seems to think I have had no substantial reasons for my belief, and hence I correct him.

"See here, Tom, you don't know all that I do. For instance, suppose I was to tell you that there is a crazy woman in the cemetery—I scared her away from your plot; the slab that bears the name of Rachel on it has been battered with a stone, as though by some spiteful hand—possibly hers?"

He looks at me as though his interest were aroused, but still shakes his head.

"I would say, John, that perhaps it is remark-

able that such a coincidence should occur; but I hope you will not lay too much stress on it, for you will be disappointed."

"Another thing, Tom—listen to me, man—all our hopes depend upon my finding some peg here to hang the case on."

"Heaven knows I wish you could, comrade—it would relieve us all wonderfully; but I fear the detective knows best, and that someone from within the house did this thing. But what else have you to tell?"

"I have spoken to you about the marked foot-print—the same I saw about the place in the grave-yard where your lot lies. It is my belief this print is made by the wretched creature who frightened me, and whom I later on scared away from the place."

"Well?"

"If that be so, then this crazy creature must have been in these grounds last night."

"Yes, but the library windows were closed; I remember it was very cool."

"If anyone entered the house, he had no need to enter by means of a window."

"What do you mean?"

"That the little side door was not only unlocked, but ajar, early in the morning, proving that your father had probably been out walking

in the grounds, and failed to secure it after him when he returned."

"How do you know this?" Tom asks, in a surprised tone of voice.

"Partly from observation, and partly through what Uncle Jethro told me. He saw the door ajar when running to the house at the early alarm, and remembered it afterwards."

"As you intimate, John, this would be a case worthy of investigation, and I will cling to it like death, if your other plan fails."

"By that you mean—"

"Madge may not appear."

"Well, we can only try, and do our best. If she does not come to time, we will accept it as a happy augury, and work with increased vim to find the guilty party. On the other hand, Tom, should she act in a way that—proves—her previous knowledge—of—the affair, you know, you must not take it too much to heart, my boy. Remember you have friends around you ready and eager to temper the blow. It would be better for you to expect the worst."

"Why, John, that is strange advice to give."

"Because I believe in being prepared for a rude shock. If, on the other hand, good news awaits you, it will be all the more welcome because unexpected."

"I comprehend your motives, and you are right,

too. It is better to be on the safe side. But I seem to have had a tremendous disappointment. I did not dream before that I was depending so much on you. Heaven help our case, John Peters, when you give it up."

"I haven't given it up yet, Tom, have I?"

"No; but you feel discouraged—I can see it in your face—and it makes my heart heavy. Tell me, can they do anything with my Madge if it turns out that—she—did—it?"

"If we can prove it was done in her sleep, they will have to let her go free. Even among the savage nations of the world, people out of their mind, temporarily or permanently, are beyond all punishment."

"So I have heard. Then, they will not proceed against her?"

"Oh, dear, yes; and experts will be summoned to swear to this, that, and the other absurdity. In the end, she will be discharged; but for weeks—yes, months—she will be held under suspicion, until the State has deliberately found all the evidence against her."

Tom groans heavily; it pierces him to the heart to have such a thought even come to him through a friendly source. He looks something like the man I braced up during the day, and I realize that his backbone needs stiffening, morally, if not physically.

What can I say to comfort him? I would coin a portion of my blood to pay for evidence in his favor, if I could; but such a thing is, of course, beyond my power.

As yet, I have not given up hope. I do not say anything about the broken nail at the gate, and Tom suspects not my thoughts. All must soon be revealed; if my idea is a success either way, they cannot but admit that my head was level when I proposed the watch.

It is half-past ten. Still an hour and a half before the time set for the meeting. I tell Tom where I expect to find him waiting on the stroke of twelve, and he promises to be there.

"What sort of a woman was this Rachel?" I ask, recovering somewhat, and desirous of pushing the investigation to the utmost.

"A bold woman, dashing in her ways, and desperately in love with my father, strange as it may seem to you; but he was many years younger when she met him, and a very handsome as well as a wealthy man."

"I can well believe it; to the day of his death, he could be called handsome."

"She was beautiful, in a way, and had some Spanish blood in her veins. I always believed Rachel was part gypsy. At any rate, the woman was jealous of the affection my father bestowed upon me, a mere boy. I disliked her, because she

took my mother's place, and we never got on well together. I remember her flying at father once as though she would tear his eyes out; but he held her hands and talked to her as he might to a child, finally reducing her spirit to a state of submission."

"When did she lose her mind—when she ran away?"

"I always had an idea she would go crazy some day. I could detect a peculiar gleam in the corners of her eyes that made me think of people I had seen shut up in a mad-house, and therefore I was not much surprised when the outbreak came. It was just before I went back to college in my Freshman year. I had come home for the Christmas holidays, you remember, and had invited you out to see me—canceling the engagement by wire the day before you were to come."

"Yes; and I never understood the cause, save that it was trouble in the family—I had not met your father then, you know."

"The fact was, she had flown at father like a tigress, with a knife in her hand, in one of her furious fits. I helped him disarm her. We thought her subdued, but that night she fled. In a fit of pique, she had run away with a villain who hated father and wished him ill. You have heard how she came back, out of her mind. In '81 father had her put in the asylum under

another name. She escaped, and attacked him in the grave-yard, and was again incarcerated. Taken all in all, it is a cruel story. I have no doubt my poor father deeply regretted ever having been foolish enough to marry again; but I never, by word or deed, reproached him for it."

"It is indeed a sad story, Tom, and if my speculations should turn out to be true, it would look as though strange fate had overhung your house. That his mad wife should, of all living persons, be the one to strike your father down, would seem to be the working of a peculiar destiny."

"Pray God it may be so. I could never know happiness again if the hand of my poor Madge were red with my father's blood—even though the deed were done unconsciously. All the sweet, hallowed memories of the past would be as dreams to us both, for his spirit would ever stand between. But I have fought for my wife before, and I am ready to do it again—my bonny Madge," he murmurs.

"Tom, you never wrote me how you met and won your wife. We have the opportunity now—would you mind relating it?" I ask; something must be done to kill the time that hangs upon us.

"If you like, John; it may be the last chance I can have to tell it from my heart, which will be broken if—that—thing proves true."

CHAPTER XXII

THE WAY HE WON HER

I had heard rumors concerning Tom's wooing, and that it had been stormy. His own words to the effect that he has fought for her before, and will again, if need be, confirm this as a truth.

Of course, any other time would do just as well to tell the story, but I am in the humor for it now, and, as Tom has declared, if this dreadful uncertainty that hangs over his house proves to be the truth, he will not have the heart to relate it in the future.

Another reason that influences me to ask him for it now is to kill time—the minutes seem to drag along interminably when one is desirous of seeing them pass quickly.

My friend endeavors to forget the bitter present in dealing with the past, and in a measure succeeds in doing so. I say nothing to remind him of it.

Tom's story is as follows:

"About two years ago I started for Europe, supplied with liberal means, and determined to see all that was worth seeing there before returning. If anyone had suggested to me the idea that I, Tom Cartaret, would bring a wife

back with me, I would have laughed him to scorn.

"Well, I spent one year in travel, and covered a great deal of ground, visiting and studying the wonders of Northern and Eastern Europe—Russia, Germany, Greece, and Turkey—passing over to Palestine and Egypt, so that I had been in both Asia and Africa.

"Then I reached Italy, and spent two months among her wonderful cities. My next destination was France, after which my route would take me to Spain, Norway, and Great Britain, when, my two years, leave of absence being up, I meant to return to my native land.

"At the time I left Turin by rail for Paris, last December, I had not the slightest idea of changing my plans. I expected to spend a couple of weeks in Paris, and a month in the rest of France, after which I should enter Spain at Barcelona, and see Castilian life along the Mediterranean.

"John, I got no further than Paris, so far as solitary sight-seeing was concerned, for I met my fate there—my Madge.

"Our meeting was singular, and, it seemed to me at the time, had a touch of destiny in it. Let me tell you briefly the romantic incident:

"I had been in Paris about ten days, and, having entered into my business with a vim, by

this time had seen pretty much all there was. One evening I chanced to be walking along the boulevard, watching the gay scene, when a horse became frightened at something and ran away. I never even looked to see who was in the vehicle, but, jumping out, caught the beast by the bridle and hung on until I had him conquered.

"Then, panting with my exertions, I looked up to see my fate gazing at me through a pair of eyes that riddled my heart on the spot. It was Madge. She thanked me so sweetly for saving her life, and I made out it was nothing, though the fiend of a horse was about as crazy as any one I ever tackled, and you know I'm a great horseman.

"Well, of course it ended in my entering the little phaeton and driving the now subdued beast home. During that brief ride my surrender was complete, and when I left Madge Wilder, with a promise to call on the morrow, I swore under my breath that unless there were insuperable impediments in the way, she would be Mrs. Tom before the year was out.

"There were obstacles to such a nice little scheme, and I soon discovered them.

"Madge lived with a maiden lady, an aunt, and I found that this person, a Frenchwoman, by the way, entertained great ideas. She hoped to

marry her niece to a coronet. That was her dream, to see her a duchess or a countess.

"I found a number of men bearing titles frequent visitors at the house, but the favored one seemed to be a certain Lord Carpenter—a man whose reputation was not of the best, but who had wealth back of his title.

"The maiden aunt favored him, while Madge returned my love. To make my story short, John, we kept this up for some months; and there were times when I despaired, as well as occasions when my hopes were exuberant.

"At last I saw Madge was in trouble—her eyes were full of unshed tears when alone with me. I had not told her my love, as yet, though she must have known it; but I could restrain my feelings no longer.

"Then I learned, what I had secretly known before, that my affection was returned. We plighted our troth, and nothing but death could separate us. I would write to my father, inclosing her picture, and tell him all. I knew he would bid me God-speed, and as soon as I had his sanction to the marriage we would be made one, after which we could laugh at scheming aunts and love-stricken English lords.

"On the very next day, just when I had mailed my letter to father, I found Madge at our trysting-place in the garden of the Tuileries. She

had her veil down, and when she raised it, at my coming, I saw that her eyes were swollen with weeping.

"Demanding the cause of her sorrow, I learned that trouble had come. Her aunt was her guardian, and Madge lacked six months of being of age; besides, the singular spinster possessed a subtle power over her when in her presence, so that Madge seemed unable to refuse to do anything she ordered.

"On the previous evening her aunt had scolded her for allowing attentions from me, when she was as good as the promised wife of Lord Carpenter, who had asked to pay her attentions—a man she detested and feared.

"I saw that a crisis had come, and that unless I wanted to lose the girl who had wrapped herself around my heart, I had better be up and doing. I quieted Madge's fears, and told her to be ready to marry me at an hour's notice.

"First of all, I meant to have an interview with Carpenter—I had met him several times, and there was no love lost between us. He was an arrogant fellow, hot-tempered and cruel, so I did not expect to gain much there.

"I sought him out, and found my man at one of the English clubs to which I had *entrée*.

"As quietly as I could, I introduced the subject, and asked him as a gentleman to cease perse-

cuting a young lady who was engaged to me in spite of her aunt's opposition.

"No gentleman could have taken exception to my language; I endeavored to be courteous, even while burning with indignation.

"The noble lord flamed up, swore horribly, and cursed me like a gutter ruffian. This was too much for my blood, and I struck him. He declared I would hear from him, at which I laughed and said the sooner the better, naming an American artist as my friend.

"They made it up in a hurry, and on the following morning at sunrise Carpenter and myself faced each other in a wood not many miles away from the city, dueling pistols in hand.

"I shall not bore you with my feelings, or anything in the way of a description. You know all about duels, if you have never been engaged in one. This was no French farce, with the principals so far apart that only by accident could one be struck; but we measured off twenty paces, stood back to back, and at a signal turned and fired.

"His bullet passed between my left arm and my body as I whirled around. Mine took him in the arm, and gave him a severe wound.

"Lord Carpenter had had enough; but while leaving the field he swore horribly at me, and declared I had not seen the last of it yet.

"I knew he was a man who would descend to

any depth in order to accomplish his purpose, and that unless I was very careful, he would win the girl I loved.

"The thought nearly set me frantic. I realized that I could not wait for father's consent, but must take my fate into my own hands, or lose all.

"So I immediately set to work making arrangements for a hurried marriage. My artist friend, Chester Palmer, gave me his hearty assistance, and in that one day all had been planned and made ready.

"Madge had agreed to meet me at four in the afternoon, and I thought there would be no trouble from this source—but I waited at the rendezvous half an hour in vain.

"What could this mean—never before had Madge treated me thus. I could surmise that one of two things was the case—either Madge must be sick, or she was detained at home.

"Here was a new trouble. I posted off to her house. The door was closed in my face, after I had been told she was not at home—which I knew was a lie, from the sneer on her aunt's face.

"Nothing daunted, I watched the building from a corner near by, and soon saw a handkerchief waving from a window—it was Madge, and she knew me.

"How was I to communicate with her? The window was just above the roof of an empty

house, and an idea came to me. I was not long in finding the agent of the empty house, and paying a sum down for its rental; then I found a lively little street Arab—and those in Paris are as bright as our New York boys.

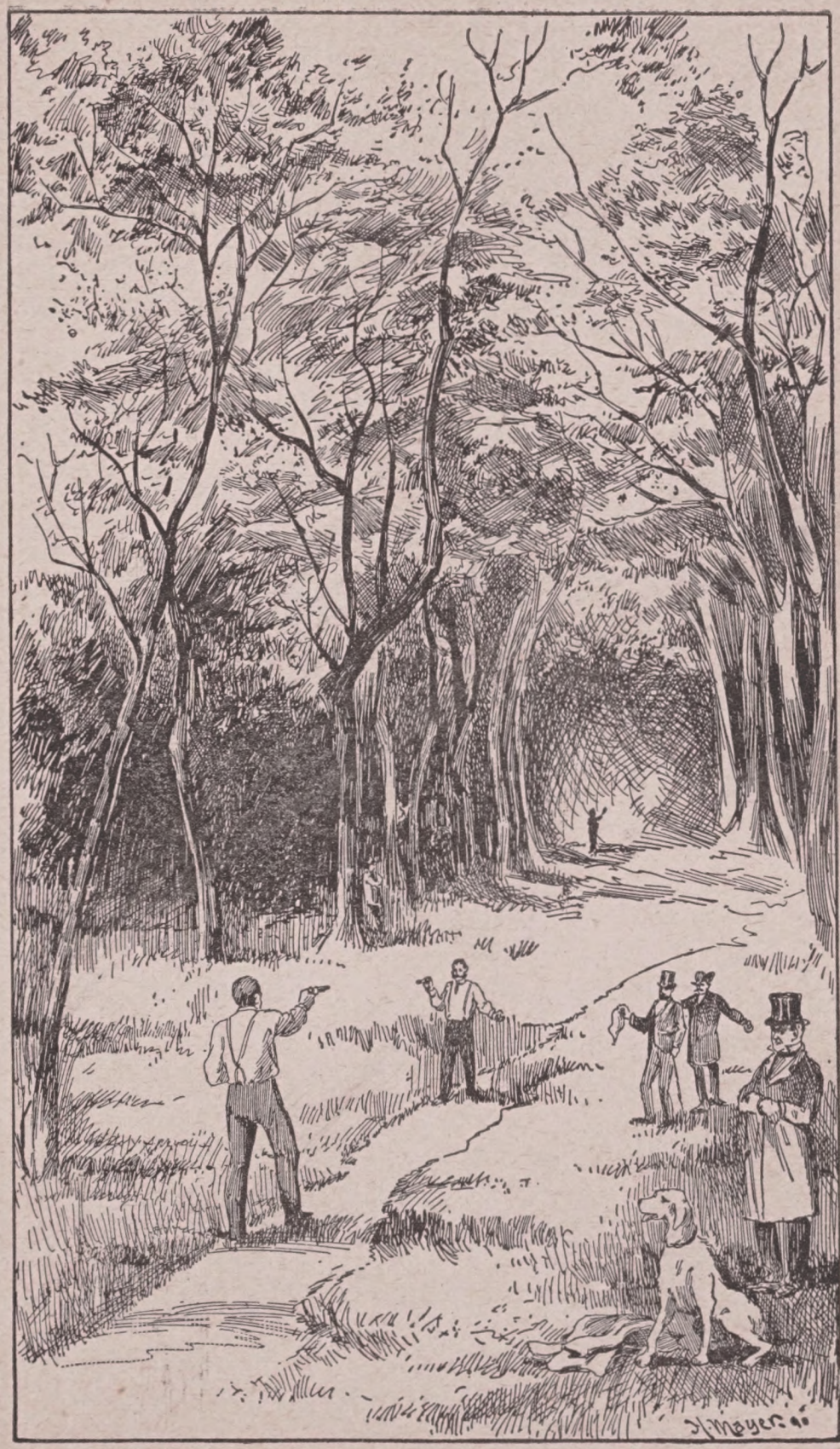
"This chap readily took a note I gave him, and when I had helped him out of the scuttle, climbed along the roof like a monkey. He could just reach the window, and rapped upon it.

"I watched him anxiously. The noise he made attracted the attention of someone inside, and then Madge's dear head appeared. She took the letter, saw me, blew me a kiss, and vanished.

"My boy came back. I remained at the scuttle and awaited the result. Soon Madge again appeared, nodded an affirmative to me, and then placed her finger on her lips to signify that there was danger—her aunt was near—so I drew in my head and shut the trap just in time to escape discovery, for I heard that sharp voice at the window.

"I now completed my plans, and at ten o'clock had a carriage waiting near by. A light in the window above told me that Madge was waiting, and I climbed up to the roof.

"There was danger here, but I had calculated all the chances, and knew what was before me. Some risk had to be taken, for everything was in peril of being lost.



HIS BULLET PASSED BETWEEN MY LEFT ARM AND MY BODY.
—Page 206.

"I reached the window with a short ladder I had secured, planted this, and then gently tapped on the ledge. Madge appeared at the window; we exchanged a few whispered words. Imagine the situation, John, away up there on the roof of a building, where the slipping of a foot would precipitate us to destruction.

"At last I held her in my arms; inch by inch I drew her along the roof toward the scuttle. She was brave, and though several times it looked as though something were about to happen, she did not utter a cry.

"And the scuttle was gained, thank heaven! I believe I lived years in the interim.

"A minute of bliss followed; the reaction was so great that the poor girl almost fainted in my arms, and I held her to my heart. But every second was precious—I could not linger, for we might be overtaken, and my promised wife snatched from my arms, to become the bride of that hated lord.

"We descended to the street—there seemed to be no danger here. My closed carriage was near at hand. Just as I was helping Madge in, I was suddenly seized, a curse sounded in my ear, and, whirling around, I found it was the Englishman who stood there.

"I promptly knocked him down, jumped into

the vehicle, and in a minute we were far down the avenue, making great time.

"When twenty minutes had gone, we were man and wife, and I could defy all the powers to part us.

"And that is the way I won Madge."

CHAPTER XXIII

UNCLE JETHRO AT THE CONFESSIONAL

I have been greatly interested by the story of Tom's wooing, and have no doubt there are other events connected with it than what he has told.

"Did they give you more trouble afterward?" I ask my friend.

"Yes, indeed; that English lord was a regular bulldog. He was not deterred even by the fact that we were married, but tried to invoke the law to separate us—through the aunt, of course. I managed to outwit them all, and finally, hearing from father, brought Madge home."

"This Gautier—"

"Was one of Madge's lovers—she cared nothing for him, but the fellow would not take no for an answer. I had some trouble with him, too, after my marriage. He hired some rascals in Spain to capture us; but they got a taste of American independence, for I was armed, and made it hot for the bandits. You know yourself the last dodge Gautier played."

"Well, I must say you have made foes that will not back out at anything. What ever became of the noble lord?"

Tom actually laughs ere replying.

"I think I effectually cooled his ardor at last. They say an incorrigible setting hen can be broken up by holding her under the pump, and I believe a bulldog Briton can be made to see the error of his ways in something of a similar fashion."

"How was that, Tom?"

"Well, we met by chance—the usual way—on the Grand Canal at Venice. I believe, though, the rascal was dogging me with some evil plan in view. At any rate, there was a collision—his gondola ran into mine, and almost upset us. There was no occasion for the accident—the canal was wide, and the moon shining. I instantly conceived the idea—seeing his face at the moment of collision wreathed with a smile of anticipated triumph—that his plan was to upset my bark, perhaps drown me, and run away with my Madge. Quick as the idea flashed into my brain, it seemed to make my blood boil—I could feel it leap through my veins like hot lava. Obeying my first impulse, I sprang into his gondola, utterly ignoring his cowering gondolier, and in a moment threw myself upon Carpenter. He struck at me with his fist savagely, but I paid no attention to the blow, any more than if it had been the bite of a fly. Some superhuman strength seemed to be given to me. I took that fellow by

the throat, shook him as a terrier might a rat, and ended by tossing him headlong into the water of the Grand Canal. Then entering my own gondola, I ordered my man to move off. Carpenter was not drowned, for I saw, a day or two later, that he had reached London, and was about to turn his attention to English politics. I think that cold plunge effectually cured him of any desire to steal another man's wife—at least, I have heard nothing more from him."

"Quite a series of adventures, old fellow. If anyone deserves a good wife, surely you do, after such heroic efforts to get and keep yours."

Tom heaves a sigh.

"No man ever loved his wife more desperately than I do mine. And to think what lies before me if this thing proves true!—John, can you wonder that my heart sinks like lead, and my whole being seems to be palsied at the thought of it?"

I utter words of cheer, without really seeing how they can be carried out; and finally, remembering that uncle is waiting for me, rise to leave Tom.

At the same time he gets up, saying he will go for a stroll, to pass the time away. I notice that he saunters toward the wall that separates the Cartaret grounds from the cemetery, but do not dream of his passing through to the lonely grave-yard.

On my part, I proceed toward the stables, having my intended interview with old Jethro ahead. I do not know what I can squeeze out of the darky, but he certainly knows something, and I am determined to get at it.

When I reach the stable, I see a light in a window which I know belongs to Jethro's room, and I glance in.

The darky is seated by the table bearing the lamp, and appears to be laboriously studying some bulky volume, presumably a Bible, for Jethro is nothing if not religious.

I tap on the window; the darky seems to be alarmed until he sees my face at the glass, when he comes out to me.

"Sit down here on this horse-block, old man. I have something to tell you that will perhaps cause you much trouble."

He does as I request, probably much surprised and not a little uneasy, for my manner alarms him as much as my words.

I know I cannot frighten him into telling what he has seen by threatening any calamity that may hover over his head, so I mean to proceed upon another tack.

"Uncle, Tom has been telling me all about his father's unfortunate second marriage. You told me it was believed that woman was drowned, when you knew she was sent to an asylum."

"'Deed, marse, I war told so. Arterwards de old marse let me into de secret," he says.

"But you did know this fact?"

"It am so."

"And, Uncle, you knew the asylum burned, and that it was believed the mad woman kept there under the name of Barbara Brown was reported burned to death—she being Rachel."

"Yes, I know dat."

"But, Uncle, was Rachel destroyed?"

He shakes his head sadly.

"Marse Luther done belieb so—he had de watch dey found on de body."

"Very true; but another maniac might have borrowed or stolen the watch. Such things are often done among crazy people."

"I dunno much about 'em."

"Oh! I thought you once told me you knew a good deal about them?"

Uncle Jethro lapses into silence; he realizes that he has stepped into a hole, and that if he flounders about it will only let him down deeper. His only way to escape is to remain quiet until someone else throws him a support by means of which he can pull himself out.

"Now, see here, Uncle, you know something that sooner or later others must learn."

No answer.

"I admire your fidelity to old Luther Cartaret;

but your duty to the living must take precedence over that to the dead."

Uncle Jethro groans.

I presume there is a great struggle in his poor mind. He believes he is doing the right thing by continuing faithful to the trust reposed in him by the dead master.

Somehow I honor the honest old fellow for it, and even hate to force him into speaking; but living issues must always take precedence over dead ones with me.

"Uncle, do you believe Rachel Babette perished in that asylum fire?" I persist.

"Dey done say so."

"But do you honestly believe it?"

"Marse Luther tole me so."

I turn upon another tack.

"Uncle, I told you of a crazy woman I had seen in the grave-yard."

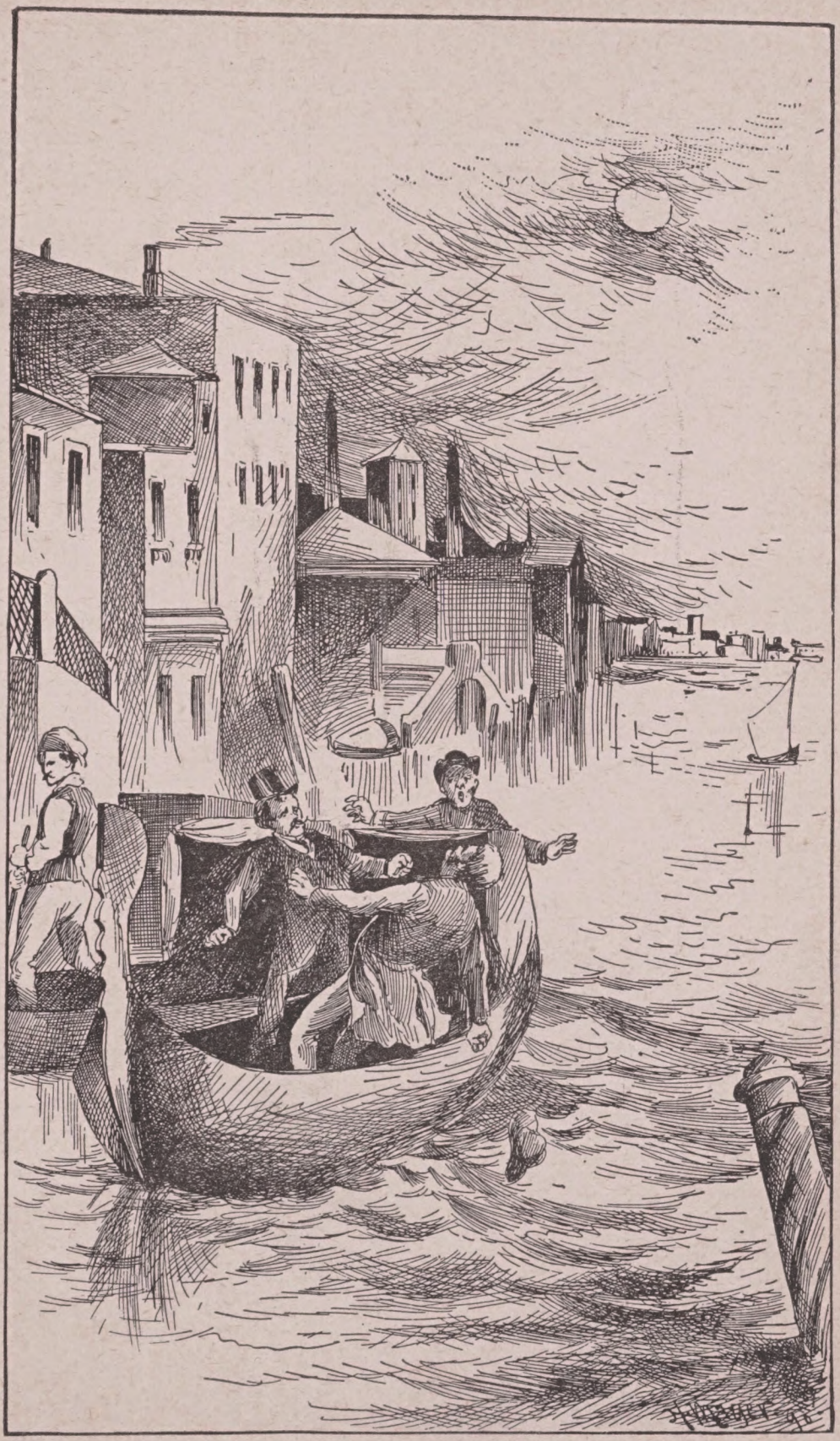
How he squirms! He knows what I believe, and fears that in some way I mean to dig his secret out of him.

"I have a strong idea that oman is Rachel Babette come back again."

"What did Marse Tom say about it?"

"He went to Europe soon after the fire, and has just lately returned—he believes she died in the fire; but I know better."

Uncle shrugs his shoulders.



I TOSSED HIM HEADLONG INTO THE WATER OF THE GRAND CANAL.—Page 213.

"Dar you hab it, Marse John."

"No; you have something to tell me, Uncle, and I conjure you, in the name of your old master, to speak now, and save trouble."

"I don't know nuffin' at all—Marse Luther, he could tell youse, but he am gone."

Talk about a mule—an ignorant darky can give the animal points in obstinacy.

"Old man, by keeping silent you will bring ruin and disgrace upon those you love. What do you care for that crazy creature?—she cannot be harmed."

"I promised de ole marse," he begins, and stops.

"No matter what you promised him, you are freed from it now. He is dead. Suspicion points to someone as his murderer. To save that person, one you love must be sacrificed."

Uncle Jethro gasps; he does not even yet comprehend the full meaning ot my words.

"Do you know what will happen, my man? To me, and in the presence of that detective, your young master, Tom Cartaret, has confessed that he is the guilty party—that it is his hand that is red with his father's blood!"

Jethro almost falls off the block—he tries to speak, but seems tongue-tied, so I proceed to rub the thing in—there is nothing like pepper and salt to make a wound sting.

"Hark you, old man, of course you know, as well as I do, that Tom is innocent; but his quarrel with his father, and the acknowledgment of guilt, will send him to the gallows."

"No, no!" he mutters, brokenly.

"It is the truth. You know he is innocent, and you would see him die before your eyes rather than break your promise to the dead."

"Marse John, I couldn't do it. I done tell anything so dat Tom not suffer. He hab nuffin' to do wif it."

"Who, then?"

"S'pose I say it was old Uncle Jethro?"

"I'd laugh in your face, old man. You haven't the power that sent that knife home. I am determined to know all. Uncle, look me in the face—who has been locked in the attic rooms of the house until lately?"

His lips move—I can see them in the moonlight, but no answer comes.

"It was the Babette woman—she was not burned in the great fire—your master captured her after Tom had gone to Europe. He determined to keep her in his own house under lock and key. Answer me, as you value your soul's salvation, Uncle, is not this so?"

My words impress him—he feels as though placed on the witness-stand, one hand resting on the Bible, and his oath given to tell the whole

truth and nothing but the truth. I have conquered his stubborn spirit at last.

"Marse, youse know it am true. Dem are de facks," he says, slowly.

"Rachel is alive?"

"I belieb so."

"The chances are this crazy woman in the grave-yard is she?"

"It look like it, sartin."

"When did she escape from her confinement?"

"Last night; she was dar de day before, kase I toted her meals up to her, all but supper, an' Chloe took dat."

"Then Chloe probably forgot to fasten the door at the head of the stairs, and the crazy woman escaped. Uncle, you did not tell me all you saw or heard when you were out last night. If you would save Master Tom's life, tell me what occurred during that time. You were near the library window, you say?"

"Yes, sah—de one around de corner whar de moon fall on it. I heered a kind o' scream, an' naturally looked dat way, jest in time to see a woman's face—den it war gone."

"A woman, Uncle?—think well; whom did you at the time believe it to be?"

"Marse John, it cuts me to de heart to say it, but I done belieb it am Marse Tom's young wife!"

CHAPTER XXIV

A CRY FROM OVER THE WALL

The poor fellow speaks this in a desperate sort of a way, as though he has been goaded to declaring it, which is literally the truth, I must acknowledge.

I weigh his words. They mean a great deal, and I desire to take them in all their bearings to each other and the whole case in general.

It is evident that Uncle Jethro believes his old master has been murdered, and that the person guilty of his death is either Tom's young wife or the crazed creature who has been the bane of Luther Cartaret's life for so many years.

His words indicate that the chances are in favor of its proving to be Madge.

This, then, is the awful thought that has been preying upon the mind of the poor darky ever since early dawn, when old Chloe came running out to the stable, wildly crying:

"Wake up! Uncle Jethro, wake up! De ole marse him done gone dead in he's library! Wake up!"

Jethro knows it is murder, despite his talk of possible "susancide;" he knows that the person

who did the terrible deed was a woman, and thinks he recognized Madge, although not sure, since he had but a glimpse of the face.

During the day, therefore, he has been "lying low," as he would have expressed it, and endeavoring to avoid being questioned.

He is a devoted servant, and owes a certain allegiance to the crazy woman, for she was the care of his master, who had often made him promise to look after her should he, Luther Cartaret, die before she did.

Then, in the other case, although Jethro has only known Madge a short time, she is the person to win the love and reverence of such a devoted servant. Besides that, she is the wife of Tom, his young master, and Jethro stands ready to coin his heart's blood into money, if need be, for the sake of "Marse Tom."

When he hears what I have to say, an awful alternative is placed before him: he must confess the truth, or see Tom punished for a crime which he did not commit.

Under these distressing circumstances, then, he blurts out the truth, and I find my little game successful in that I have learned all he knows.

"Jethro, if you were put on the witness-stand, and made to swear, with your hand on the

Bible, would you be able to declare that it was Tom's wife you saw?" I ask.

"I would not, Marse John; I only think it were she—but I don't swear to it," he replies.

"The moonlight is deceptive."

"Dat am a fack."

"Women look much alike—especially when seen under such circumstances—and there is something similar in the cast of features between Tom's wife and poor, crazy Rachel."

"Marse John, I notice dat."

"It is just possible, then, that you may have mistaken one for the other. This could not happen in broad daylight, or if the circumstances were different; but I really believe, as it was, such a thing could easily be."

"An' so do I. De only ting I kin swar to was dat it war one ob de two."

Here I rest my case. I have caused Jethro to admit all I ever wanted, and I believe I now have a good fighting chance to win the game, in spite of being heavily handicapped.

Poor old uncle has proven no match for the lawyer, and yet I confess it was about the toughest molar I ever had to draw. Success would never have come to me, only that I gained the leverage of his fears with regard to "Marse Tom," and in this manner reached the desired result.

I doubt if uncle knows anything more of value to me. A few little points need burnishing, and I ask him further questions. As his reserve has been wholly broken down now, he does not hesitate to answer me frankly.

Eleven o'clock has come and gone; time is now stretching on toward the solemn hour of midnight, when something may happen if my plans do not miscarry.

Uncle Jethro is tired; I tell him to go to bed, and not think of these things, leaving them for others to wrestle with, who are better able to comprehend such intricate problems. I assure him that it will come out all right, but say nothing about Madge's habit of sleep-walking, as I believe the old darky has already about as much on his mind as he can carry.

I hope he will go to bed and sleep soundly; we have no need of his services, and he would only be in the way if he prowled around.

So I see him back to his room, borrow a match with which to light my cigar, and then saunter away. Perhaps I have some news now that may interest Tom. He will take fresh courage when he hears that, after all, Rachel was not one of the victims of the asylum fire, but for two years has been confined in his father's house; that she escaped on the night of the murder, and is now concealed in the grave-yard.

When Tom hears these startling facts, he must take new hope—his fears will vanish like the fog before a breeze.

I feel better myself—decidedly so; and I puff my cigar with a sense of exhilaration, as though I am on the point of winning a victory. Indeed, I even feel sorry for Mr. Smithers, just as a lucky greenhorn might declare he was sorry, but could not help all the good cards coming to his side. He will take it all good-naturedly, I presume, for he has given me to understand as much; at any rate, he declared that, although his professional dignity might be hurt, he hoped I would win the game.

What if she does not come?

My faith is not at all shattered, and I believe we will find means to prove the case anyway. Once I put Smithers on it, I am sure his keen professional scent will bring about victory. Even your best dog often has to be led to the trail, and given to understand who it is he is bent upon tracking.

The mild Havana I am smoking is very soothing to the nerves.

How gloriously the moon shines! This is a night for lovers—such as is long remembered. It is a night for any honest deed—only crime shrinks abashed from this flood of glory.

A gentle breeze stirs the branches of the trees;

the leaves rustle above, and under foot, for they are fast falling, and I think what a grand time Tom and I might be having at our old stamping-ground, among the whirring partridges. It is just such weather as this that tones one up to the work, makes the blood tingle, and gives new life in place of the old.

Have patience! Everything comes to those who wait, and in good time I will, no doubt, be following my setter, Prince Hal, through the brush of the old farms where I love to hunt so well.

Once in my walk I come near the house. All is quiet in that quarter; a light or two may be dimly seen, but not a sound is heard. Death broods over that great mansion; he has come like a thief in the night, and set his seal upon the old master's face.

Before another night rolls around there will be changes here; the master must be laid in his last resting-place, beside the wife he loved, and the coroner's jury will have met to hear the evidence, and decide how Luther Cartaret came to his death.

Yes; and it is to be sincerely hoped that long before that event takes place the truth will have become manifest, and the load of guilt placed where it belongs. I have faith in it.

My game has become so strong now that I do

not believe it can be battered down. I have worked while Smithers laid on his oars, simply because he believed he had everything his own way. It is the old story of the race between the tortoise and the hare again; the tortoise won because the hare, being so far ahead, lay down to take a nap, and overslept himself.

Where can Tom be? has he gone to the house? Well, I expect to be moving in that direction myself as soon as I have finished my weed—it is too good to throw away.

I take out my watch, and by a trick known to all smokers, of puffing at my cigar rapidly, cause enough light to enable me to see the dial, even under the shadow of the trees.

It is 11:30! Another half-hour to elapse before we need to set our trap. In all my life I have never known time to pass so slowly; it seems to fairly drag along, and I have certainly lived a year since reaching Clifton on the 7:30 express.

As I saunter about, I allow my thoughts to cover a good deal of ground, for the circumstances of the case are such that there can be much latitude in one's foraging.

I even arrange in my mind the position each one will take while on the watch for the second advent of the mysterious assassin, so that the ground can be covered to the best advantage.

Three of us should be able to do it thoroughly, and nothing escape us. If Madge issued from her room, her course could be watched.

Still pondering over these things, I enter upon the avenue where Tom and myself had walked when conversing. The little rustic seat is reached and passed, and my thoughts go back to the late interview with my friend.

Tom must be found, and told the latest news; I know it will make him feel good.

I am just debating in my mind whether I had better go to the house, or look for him further in the grounds, when a sound comes to my ears that causes me to stand as motionless as a statue, and listen.

What is it?

The cry—for such I determined it to be—comes from the direction of the cemetery. I remember the uncanny creature whom I have seen there, and believe at once it must be from her this weird shriek emanates.

Suddenly there flashes through my mind the recollections of Tom; when last I saw him he was heading in the direction of the wall, and perhaps passed through into the grave-yard.

What if that mad thing has met him there?

Tom told me she always hated him, and it might be that this feeling has been carried over

the dark sea which she crossed when her mind gave way to chaos.

If they have met among the tombs, she would no doubt spring at him like a tiger, and I have reason to fear the strength of even a weak woman when crazed.

At once I take the alarm—perhaps I ought to go in search of my friend, who may be in a position of extreme peril.

I start along the avenue, throwing away my cigar. There is a strong chance that, in an encounter with the mad woman, I will not come out any better than Tom; but I have no time to bother with such questions now—duty beckons me.

Hardly have I gone half the distance along the avenue of stately elms than I see a moving figure in the patch of moonlight beyond. I come to a halt, waiting to see whether it is Tom or the woman; another patch of light is reached, and the form that moves along the avenue comes into view.

I draw a sigh of relief—it is Tom!

From the way he moves along, I feel confident that something has happened.

CHAPTER XXV

"IT IS TIME!"

Tom advances hurriedly, and, as it happens, while passing across the broad arrow of moonlight that pierces the avenue of elms, he turns his head, looking anxiously over his shoulder.

That one act convinces me that my friend has had some connection with the weird cry that came floating to my ears from over the wall.

He draws closer. When about to pass me by, I call out:

"Ah, there, Tom!"

"John, is that you?"

He is panting heavily, as though having recently passed through some severe exertion.

"Tom, what is the matter?" I ask.

With that, he walks up to me and lays his hand impressively on my shoulder, saying:

"John, if I hadn't such positive evidence that Rachel Babette is dead, I would be ready to believe I had met her in the cemetery yonder—that your suspicions were true."

"And on my part, Tom, since seeing you, I have learned that such a thing is the case," I return, impressively.

"Then, Rachel—"

"Is alive! that is she in the grave-yard."

"But it seems improbable—for two years she must have been roaming about the country."

"Not so. On the contrary, for two years she has been an inmate of your father's house, locked in the attic rooms, which were made into a prison for her, and from which she only escaped last night."

Tom hears this with surprise.

"Can this be true?"

"Believe me, it is."

"How have you learned these facts, John?"

"By questioning the one person who could tell them," I make reply.

"And that person was—"

'Uncle Jethro."

When he hears this, Tom gives a low whistle.

"I told you he was as close as a clam; by what means did you open his lips?"

"By using those great levers—love and fear."

"Explain, John."

"I knew his love for you, Tom, and felt that I could make use of this in order to force from him the secret he held. I told him that circumstances pointed to you as the guilty party, and that, in all probability, your life would pay the penalty unless he spoke out."

"And that fetched him?" eagerly.

"Yes; he said he was ready and willing to keep the wishes of his dead master as far as he could, but that when it came to seeing you suffer, when you were innocent, he could keep silent no longer. I questioned him, and found out all about Rachel having been kept a prisonerin the attic—a fact I have dimly suspected for some little time—and also what uncle saw last night when out in the grounds here—things he did not inform me of when we had our last talk."

"What were these facts?"

Tom is still very nervous, and it can hardly be wondered at—he has passed through the tortures of the fiery furnace within the last twenty hours, and has undergone a strain that would have killed some men.

"He saw a face in the library window—I cannot explain exactly—perhaps the heavy, maroon-colored curtains shut the light away; at any rate, the moon fell upon her face."

"It was a woman?" he gasps, his hand tightening on my arm.

"Yes."

"Was it—Madge?"

"Jethro cannot swear to it—he thought so at the time, but now he is not sure. He even believes it may just as readily have been Rachel, since the two have something of the same look—that is, understand me, Tom, both have dark eyes,

although when I saw Rachel, her hair was flying and she seemed like a fiend."

"She is a fiend," mutters Tom, mechanically, placing a hand to his head.

This reminds me.

"You met her there?" I ask.

"Yes; and she nearly murdered me."

"Tell me about it, Tom."

"Let us sit down here, then; I feel tired."

Nothing loath, I accompany him to a seat, and we occupy it together.

"Have we time?" asks Tom.

"Yes, nearly half an hour yet; don't worry about that, old fellow."

"When I left you, John, I thought to take a stroll and smoke a weed, for the sake of passing time away. You can imagine my feelings and thoughts—I shall not speak of them. Unconsciously, I walked in the direction of the door in the wall, and passed through into the cemetery. Still wandering on along the well-known path, I finally reached the Mecca of many a walk—my mother's grave. I had visited it since my return, but my spirits to-night seemed to be in strange harmony with the scene. Sitting there, I thought of the times long gone by. I remember little or nothing of my mother personally, as I was very small at the time she passed to a better world; but father has told me so much of her, and

NEVER WILL I FORGET HER FACE.—Page 234.

her picture has always been in this locket on my watch-chain, so that it seems as though I knew and loved her. Time passed unheeded by me. I could not say how long I sat by the side of the grave, but since you tell me it is past the half-hour, I must have been there quite a while. A sound aroused me. I was sitting in the shadow, and the moonlight fell upon the two stones that mark the plot of ground. Looking up, I was astonished to see some human being moving, and as I sat there, from among the bushes came the woman you described, her hair tangled and half covering her face, the whole expression being that of a maniac. Holding my breath, I watched this weird creature, wondering if I were about to receive some clue that would benefit Madge—such an idea flashed into my mind, strange as it may seem. She fluttered over the ground in a peculiar way, and I could hear a crooning sound proceeding from her lips—no other words would describe the noise exactly. Presently she was bending down over the slab that has the name Rachel Babette on it; the sight of the marble seemed to excite her, just as a red *muleta* does the bull in the arena. Picking up a stone, she began to batter the slab viciously, all the while exclaiming: 'It is a lie—a base lie! Fire and water cannot destroy her! She is immortal! But he, the arch-devil—he must die! he who put this lie

here!' and so she went on raving and pounding. Perhaps it would have been wiser for me to have remained where I was, and I should have done so had she confined her mutilation entirely to the marble slab; but when I saw her turn her attention to the granite monument that marked mother's grave, indignation got the better of caution. I sprang out, and, seizing her arm, hurled the stone into the bushes. She turned and looked at me in the moonlight; and never will I forget her face. If ever there was a fiend from Hades in this world, that woman is one. 'What would you here—begone!' I cried. With that, she crouched like a tiger about to spring. I never knew what fear was in my life, before, John, but the strangest shudder passed through my frame just then—it was like a chill. 'Keep off, you she-devil!' I had hardly said this before she was at me, clawing and tearing. I believe that if I had let her close with me, she would have torn my eyes from my head. Never have I fought with a woman before, and I pray heaven I never may again. It seemed contemptible for me to be striking at her, but I really believe she would have murdered me. Even as it was, she gave me a scare—I could hardly keep her hands away from my face, and I began to believe there was no way out of the mess but to stretch this insane creature at my feet. As luck would have

it, in knocking aside her reaching arms, I happened to strike her a smart blow on the head. It was then she gave that fiendish shriek you may have heard."

I nod my head in the affirmative.

"Seeing my chance, I turned and hastily left the spot, taking advantage of her confusion, but I did not know whether she would follow me or not, and kept looking behind as I hurried along the path."

"You don't think you injured her?"

"No, no; the blow was not hard enough for that. It surprised and startled her; that is all."

Tom's story does not amaze me—it is just what I might have expected, when the crazed Rachel met young Cartaret. As for myself, I had no hankering after an encounter with the mad creature, alone in the cemetery.

Tom might consider himself fortunate to have come out of it without damage, and I do not hesitate to tell him so.

What he has related gives me even more positive proof that I am on the right trail, and I feel that, unless something occurs to prevent the ghost from walking, we will soon be treated to the closing act in the drama.

"Shall we go in?" asks Tom.

"Wait a few minutes more. Repeat her words

as near as you can—I want to impress them on my mind."

"You mean what she said to herself while she was pounding at the slab?"

"Yes."

"They were word for word just as I have given them to you—I know it, for it seems as though they were burned on my brain in letters of fire. I will repeat them: 'It is a lie—a base lie! Fire and water cannot destroy her! She is immortal! But he, the arch-devil—he must die! he who put this lie here!'"

"Let us see what lies in that tirade. By the reference to fire and water, she undoubtedly means the tragedy at Watkin's Glen, where she was reported drowned, and the burning of the insane asylum, in which she was supposed to have perished."

"Yes, that is true."

"Then, by 'arch-devil'—he who was responsible for the false inscription—'he must die'—without a doubt, she meant your father."

"But her words would indicate that she did not know of his death?"

"Ah! consider her malady. She might murder him every night, and think it but a phantasy of her brain. No doubt, mentally she has done this many a time. That is no proof that she is innocent. I would rather be inclined to think of

it as just that way; and that she will come again to-night at the same hour, to again enact the tragedy over. No, no, Tom; her words to me form the cement that binds my chain together. I am eager to test the result."

"Then, let us go to the house—I have an idea I would like to speak about.

"It is time."

Again I examine my watch—this time by the light of the moon—and find it just ten minutes of twelve.

CHAPTER XXVI

WAITING

We walk to the house. Neither says a word, for, somehow, both of us seem to be busy with our thoughts. I myself confess to a little nervousness, for the strain has been long continued; and as the period for the crisis draws near, I am considerably worked up over the possible success or failure of my plan.

We enter the house, and in the dimly-lighted hall see a figure start up—it is Smithers.

The three of us walk into the library. Here, upon stretchers, lies the rosewood casket that contains all that is mortal of Luther Cartaret—the spirit has flown. I have seen death too often to tremble in his presence; and walking up to the casket, I look upon the fine face of the grand old man.

Tom follows me. He bears up well, but I know what he suffers—still waters run deep—and I respect his silent grief.

"He looks very natural," he says, slowly; and, indeed, the undertaker has done well, for the old man seems to be in a placid sleep.

Smithers arouses us.

"Gentlemen, we must decide upon our plan of action without much loss of time. It is Mr. Peters' idea—and a very good one, too, although, of course, we cannot be certain that it will succeed; but, at any rate, we are here to make the attempt."

I remember now what Tom has said about having a new thought. Now is his time to speak, or it will be too late. That being the case, I mention it.

"My idea was this: We expect someone to enter this room intent on murder; that person hopes to find my father seated in his easy-chair, and the sight of this coffin here may disarrange all our plans."

I look at Smithers. The detective smiles, and nods.

"Quite right, Mr. Cartaret; quite right. To prove the matter fully, things should be as similar as possible to what they were last night. Quite right, sir," he says.

"What do you intend to do, Tom? You would not place the body in the chair again?"

"No, no; not that. I did think of it—but that would be sacrilege. Besides, there is no need of it—we can accomplish the same result in another way."

"Explain, then."

"Suppose we, first of all, remove this to the

little side room;" and he points at the casket.

To this both of us agree, and accordingly take hold. While Tom and I, being the stronger, raise the coffin, Smithers picks up the two wooden horses and moves with them ahead into the adjoining apartment.

When we enter here we find them ready to receive the burden, and, on our part, we are quite ready to put it down, for it is uncomfortably heavy and cumbersome.

We pause for a minute to catch our breath, and then move into the library again. The first scene in the closing act of the drama has been enacted, and we move along to the next.

Tom gently wheels the easy-chair to its place beside the table. I guess his motive.

"Tom, you must not dream of it," I expostulate.

"Why not? I am something like my father; a little flour dusted through my hair will complete the resemblance—enough for this performance, at any rate. Besides, the light will be dim. You need not fear of the cheat being discovered, John."

"It is not that, my friend; I am only alarmed lest it should be too successful," I answer.

"How is that? Don't talk in riddles."

"To be plain, then, you know what we expect—that one out of her senses, and bent on murder, will enter this library within the next hour?"

"Yes."

"Suppose you sit there, apparently asleep, and she suddenly pounces on you—what is to prevent her from burying the knife she holds in your heart, even as it was buried in that of your father?"

Tom shrugs his shoulders.

"I am willing to take the chances," he declares.

"But we are not—Smithers, do you side with me in this?" I appeal to the detective.

"It would be a foolish move for Mr. Tom. I wouldn't sit in that chair, and let a crazy person advance on me with a knife, for a pension."

"There; we are two against one, and you must give in, Tom," I say, firmly.

"If you insist on it, of course I shall; but what shall we do to carry out the idea?" he asks, in a dejected tone.

I instantly conceive the wild idea that Tom has been brooding over his troubles so heavily that his mind is hardly right, and that he has even decided it would be a sweet thing if he could also die at the hands of his wife. A strange notion, it is true; but people in his condition are apt to indulge in odd fancies, and Tom is certainly on the brink of insanity himself.

"I think we could make up a dummy that would pass muster in the dim light. After all, what we want is that the person enter this room

with the knife in her hand; it will be easy to judge the rest."

"Mr. Peters is right. Can we depend on you, Mr. Tom, for garments to do this thing?" says Smithers.

"Go into his closet, and help yourselves."

We once more seek the adjoining room, and begin to carry out some of the clothes. Smithers takes it in hand, and I am surprised to see how expert the man can be; he certainly knows how to fashion a good dummy on short notice.

I assist him when practicable, and between us we manage to get on well.

The figure is seated in the chair, with the back toward the library door, one arm resting on the table, and above the top of the chair can just be seen the little black-silk skull-cap Luther Cartaret was accustomed to wear during nine months of the year, because his hair was scant, and this made him an easy subject for colds.

When the work has been finished, I step back in the direction of the door, meeting Tom, who has been out of the room.

I can guess where he comes from.

"Is she still asleep?" I ask.

He nods his head, and a smile of great tenderness lights up his face.

"Yes; I don't believe she has moved a particle,

but as I looked in upon her she moaned a little in her sleep," he answers.

"Poor girl! she has had a bad day. I trust to-morrow will be brighter for her."

"What have you done here?"

"Look for yourself."

He glances around the room, and as his eyes reach the great arm-chair, they rest there. A startled expression crosses his face, and his lips tremble as they mutter:

"It is terribly real! How often have I seen him thus as I entered here; alas, my poor father!"

And the man seems to be on the point of breaking down, for I hear a dry sob escape from his chest; but, with a great effort, he recovers his self-possession, and remains calm.

I believe we have done our work about as well as anyone could under the circumstances; and if the scheme is not a success, it cannot be blamed on poor judgment in arranging matters here.

Of course, if the ghost will not walk, we cannot expect to gain the end we seek; but we have laid great stress upon such a thing taking place.

I have not forgotten one important part of the programme, but that concerns me alone, and I do not have to consult my confederates. Leaving them in the library, I slip out, and make my way to the little side door.

As I expected, I find this securely locked.

Old Chloe has not neglected her duty on this night, whatever she may have done on the preceding one.

A distinct purpose has drawn me here, and I proceed to put it into execution. Time has dragged along with leaden wings up to this period, but now each minute is apt to count as something.

Turning the key in the lock, I take it out and drop it in a corner. The door is not secured—anyone can enter from without.

To make sure of this, I even turn the knob and draw the door back; a flood of moonlight greets my eyes, and I see the lovely scene of shadow and brightness spread out beyond.

I leave the door ajar, and smile as I mentally compare my action to a trap set for a wary beast with some bait lying near which will be an inducement for him to enter.

Will my expected game come? I confess to sudden qualms of fear lest it may be a mistaken fancy on my part—it is so easy to build up a theory, and so hard to carry it into practice.

At such times I am compelled to summon all my reserve force to the rescue, and chase the intruder Doubt from his lodging-place, lest he soon overwhelm me.

All seems ready now. We wait for but one thing, and that is the most important element

of all—the corner-stone of the structure we are building with so much care.

Will she come? I have an indefinite fear lest the encounter with Tom in the cemetery may have been the means of turning her insane thoughts the other way; but we can only trust to heaven.

All that man can do we have done, and the rest must be left to a higher power. The door in the wall is unfastened, that opening into the house ajar, just as on the preceding night; so that if the strange notion strikes Rachel Babette, there is no obstacle to her coming.

So thinking, I make my way again to the library, where I find that, upon Smithers' advice, both of the others have removed their shoes. The idea is instantly caught, together with its advantages, and I proceed to follow their example. Thus we can move around, when necessary, without making any noise by means of which our presence might be discovered. Then we speak of our hiding-places.

Smithers declares a better place could not be found than the little room connected with the library. A *portière* drawn across the door-way affords a splendid means of concealing the form, while it will be easy to find a way of peeping from the folds. Besides, in case of necessity, one is only half a dozen steps from the dumb

figure in the old arm-chair, and this space can readily be cleared, in case of necessity.

I see Smithers concealing himself there, while Tom creeps out of the room to again look upon his sleeping wife above.

All is well!

There is no reason why the trap should not be set now—everything is ready. After that one glance around, I raise my arm and proceed to turn the gas lower. It is reduced to a small blue flame, being made of gasoline on the premises; but the light is sufficient for our purpose, as objects can be seen across the room.

Having done this, I leave the library and make my way in the direction of the small door, for, while here, I can keep watch on both sides at once.

Which will it be? Oh that this question were decided!

CHAPTER XXVII

THE GHOST WALKS

Minutes pass.

All insect life has gone when the frost swept down from the cold north, so that the only sound coming to my ears is the soft rustle of the leaves when the gentle breeze fans them—otherwise it is as still as death.

I have opened the door so that I may watch, and sincerely hope and trust something will happen.

If she comes, I can see her flitting along in the moonlight while she is yet some distance away—in plenty of time to step back and close the door; the shadow hanging at this side of the house will prevent my being discovered.

Thus I keep watch and ward.

All is as quiet inside the house as out, for not a sound may be heard.

Such a night I shall remember to my dying day; it seems to have the power to rise up before me in all its phases, and whenever my thoughts go backward, they must rest upon the chain of events that mark its course.

I have been in my position perhaps ten min-

utes or so, when I receive a sudden shock. Something touches my arm, and turning, I see the shadowy outlines of a form. It is Tom. Were the light more powerful, I might distinguish the pallor and anguish of his face; as it is, I am left to judge this from the tremor in his voice as he addresses me.

"John, come with me," he whispers.

"What's the matter?"

"She is moving about, and I am afraid she means to come down-stairs."

I confess a cold chill falls upon me; it is as if an icy hand had suddenly clutched my heart.

What if, after all, Madge comes down, takes the knife which I have carefully placed in the hall, just as it was on the previous night, and creeps into the room, intent on the awful work!

Poor Tom! I can fully understand his fears—they have awakened again to life, and rack his tortured soul. Well, it must soon be over, at any rate; either dawn will open her glorious light before him, or else a blacker night than he has ever known engulf him. There is some satisfaction in that.

I push the door gently to, but leave it ajar, as has been my former intention.

We can both glide along without making any noise, for our shoes have been taken off. In this

"MY GOD! JOHN, SHE IS COMING."—Page 249.

way we enter the main hall, where the gas has been turned low.

Trembling like an aspen, Tom looks toward the stairs, and I am aware of a curious fluttering at my own heart as I glance in that direction.

All is still.

The moon peeps through the little stained-glass window at the landing above, and reflects the various colors upon the wall.

While we crouch at the angle and watch, I feel Tom clutch my arm again, and hear this sibilant whisper in my ear:

"My God! John, she is coming! Look!"

As true as fate, there upon the landing stands a figure in white—motionless, as though hesitating whether to come down or not. Can she suspect our presence, or have heard Tom's whisper? —it does not seem possible.

And she is coming down! —what does that mean?

I feel for Tom. Every nerve in his body must be stretched to its fullest tension, and a man of his build is a mass of nerves, once his nature is aroused by such a calamity.

All I can do is to watch, and keep close to Tom, so that I may clutch hold of him in case he shows signs of fainting.

With a noiseless, gliding movement, the lady comes down the stairs. Of course, the light being dim, I am unable to see her face plainly

enough to analyze it; but there is that in her motions to tell me she walks in her sleep—a peculiar something hard to explain. She does not grope her way; her eyes are open, and yet, while she sees so as to avoid obstacles, she notices nothing else. It is a strange condition to be in; and yet with some people it seems to be a disease from childhood.

Fascinated, yet appalled, we watch Madge descend the stairs. She reaches the bottom, where she stands a moment as if in a state of doubt, while poor Tom trembles so violently I am afraid he will go into a spasm.

Ah! again she glides forward, toward the library door. It is all up!—we can hardly doubt now the identity of the assassin.

What is this?—she does not pause when she reaches the library, but goes on. Tom gasps something—I do not know what it is, but believe he means to express great relief. I watch the figure move along the hall; it vanishes from view within the dining-room.

By this time I have aroused myself to action, and grasping Tom's arm, hurry him after the vanished figure. We reach the door, and stand there gazing in mute astonishment.

Tom Cartaret's wife is standing at the buffet—she has calmly poured out a glass of water from

the silver ice-pitcher always found there, and is quenching her thirst.

All this we can see, because the moonlight chances to enter at the bay window and disperse the darkness in the room. I feel a thousand per cent. better already; it seems to me as though the clouds were rolling away and the blue sky shining through—the dismal rain has ceased to beat upon our hearts, the carol of birds sounds among the trees. Where erstwhile all was blackness and despair, now come the glad light and peace of hope.

Madge sets the tumbler down with as much deliberation as though fully conscious of what she is doing, and, turning, glides toward us. We involuntarily step back out of the way, but, giving us one look, she pays no further attention than if we were blocks of wood. People who walk in their sleep see, but do not recognize their dearest friends—they seem to be gifted with a peculiar power of avoiding obstacles, and yet pay no attention to human beings.

Turning from us, she moves off, heading directly for the stairs, up which flight she goes, and vanishes from our view.

Tom turns and falls upon my neck. The tears well from his eyes—I can feel them on my hand, and thank God for the relief to his burning brain.

"John, she is innocent! I will stake my life on it now!" he mutters, hoarsely.

I am ready to believe the same thing myself—her actions have convinced me; but I remember that the work to which I have devoted my powers is only half done.

If we have proven Tom's wife innocent, the mystery still hangs over the Cartaret house.

Who is guilty?

My ideas on that subject grow stronger with each passing moment, and I can hardly keep from laughing in my sleeve when I think how neatly I have put Mr. Smithers in a hole.

Tom leaves me to follow his wife upstairs, and in a few minutes he steals back to report that she is sleeping soundly in the chair.

I make up my mind that we had better conceal ourselves; if Rachel comes, she will not be walking in her sleep, and a suspicious sound may cause her to fly. There can be no one more wide awake than an insane person.

Looking around, I discover that there is a niche in the wall behind the hat-rack, which is one of those massive old-fashioned pieces of furniture so seldom seen nowadays.

By moving it a trifle, Tom and I can conceal ourselves behind the friendly buttress. It so happens that this stands just opposite the

library door, and I consider this fact as so much in our favor.

Once we are ensconced in our nook of hiding, we wait, with what patience we can command, for the next event to take place. It seems as though a drama were being enacted—a tragedy more than a comedy—and now, thank heaven! we have come to what may be the last scene.

Patience, friend Tom! You have gone through the worst of it all, and the balance cannot affect you so seriously.

Was that sound the creaking of a door? Our sense of hearing has been sharpened to an astonishing extent, and we catch noises that, under other circumstances, would not be noticed.

No; it is the squeaking of a mouse somewhere near. The little rodent, a moment later, scampers across the hall and into the dining-room.

Still we wait.

Time drags along. I wonder if we have not been crouching here an hour—at any rate, it seems an age to me, for my limbs are cramped, such is the confined nature of our hiding-place.

If Rachel fails to come, our work will only be half done; but I am not ready to give up in despair—while there's life there's hope, and the hour is not yet too late.

What I fear most of all, is that her encounter with Tom has alarmed the woman, and turned

her mad thoughts elsewhere. In such a case, she will not come.

The moon has worked around so that it shines upon the library windows, just as it must have done on the preceding night when poor old Uncle Jethro saw his vision behind the glass and outlined against the dark curtains.

Tom shows astonishing fortitude in bearing up with the fatigue; but, then, he has everything at stake; and love causes him to hold out.

Thus, in times past, wise generals, in selecting a company to defend some vital point, picked out those with families, knowing they would, as a rule, hold out longer than single men, having more at stake in the matter.

Tom thinks not of fatigue; his whole mind is devoted to the one idea of proving his wife innocent by fastening the guilt where it belongs. He hardly moves beside me there, but watches and waits, believing that heaven, having been so kind, will carry the case still further.

This satisfies me, as my thoughts have been almost wholly with Tom. For myself there is nothing to fear, but with him it is different, since his brain has been under such a strain.

All things must come to an end, and this period of suspense is finally broken. This time I know it is the opening of a door that causes that sound, and I draw Tom's attention to the

fact, although there is probably no need of that, as he is as wide-awake as I am.

A rustle of garments reaches us, and we hold our breath in suspense, our eyes fastened upon the point where the smaller hall merges into the main one.

It is here she must appear. The light is strong enough to disclose her presence, and we can watch without being seen. Oh! the tremendous suspense of the next minute! We know, we feel, that someone is advancing along the narrow passage-way, even though we can neither see nor hear them. This doubtless comes from what might be called intuition—certainly nothing else would give us the power to divine what is taking place.

Our agony ends—around the corner steals a figure. Never in all my life have I seen such an awful spectacle as the one that now greets me.

It is Rachel Babette. The mad woman of the tombs has come to repeat her dreadful deed of the night before. She looks like the Witch of Endor, her hair streaming over her face, and her whole appearance indicating the absence of sense —the presence of a crazy fury bent on murder.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AT LAST!

The dreadful figure comes gliding along the hall, her face turning this way and that, as though the crazed creature continually suspects impending danger; but we remain as silent as death behind the rack, and she does not dream of glancing there.

She has reached the hall-table; here lie my tools of the camp and hunt—gun, knife, package of ammunition, corduroys, and such things. At this table she stops for a moment—we can see her hover over it—and then she goes on. I ascertain at a glance that, although the deer-skin case for my hunting-knife is still there, the trusty blade itself has gone.

This is just as I suspected. Had I been a born detective, I could not have made out a better case. No sooner has the mad creature vanished within the library, than I leave my place of concealment and steal softly to the door, followed by my companion. We are determined to be witnesses of the last scene in the tragedy, and the time for this has come.

When we reach the library door, we come to a

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halt, and stand as if petrified. If I could only blot out that scene from my mind, how gladly would I do so; but I fear it has been painted there for all time. Shutting my eyes, I can see it now, just as plainly as though it were taking place again.

The crazy woman has advanced close up to the easy-chair, where the supposed figure of old Luther is seated; she creeps forward with a cat-like movement, that sends a shudder through one to observe it. I see the blue flame of the dimly-burning gas shine upon the blade of the knife she carries, and I can guess easily enough to what use she means to put it.

Now the woman-tiger is close enough for a sudden spring to land her at the side of the motionless figure; she seems to be gathering her powers for such a leap, and I know the end has come.

Tom's breathing close to my ear tells me that he is on hand. Rachel Babette must not be allowed to leave that room again—the scene of her terrible crime. Caught in the act, she must be secured, to prevent further damage.

As I expect, she makes a sudden lunge forward, and the steel flashes in the gaslight; we can hear a dull thud, telling that it has been buried, with all the desperate power of her arm, in the dummy figure of Luther Cartaret.

Then comes a wild shriek—the mad woman has discovered the cheat put upon her—she leaps back, and glares first at the mock body and then at the knife she holds.

"It is a lie! another lie, just like the stone at the grave! There is no blood! I cannot see him stare at me! I know—this is his ghost, and they have set a trap for me to drag me down. I can see the grinning devils all around me—keep back or I will kill you; keep back, you witch of Satan, or I will send this knife through your heart!"

With this last shriek she suddenly hurls my heavy hunting-knife like a thunderbolt at a costly mirror in which she has seen a reflection of her own mad self. There is a mighty crash of falling glass, and a crazy laugh from the woman.

"Dead! I told you I would do it. That is the way I treat all I hate! I was brought up to know the use of a knife in Corsica. What! are there more of you? and am I unarmed? I will tear your eyes out, you devils!"

With that she makes a dash at Smithers, who has incautiously entered the room, coming from behind the curtains. He has no idea of engaging in a hand-to-hand encounter with this woman, endowed with all the supernatural strength that accompanies insanity, and consequently, when

he sees her advancing, he dodges her furious assault and runs, with Rachel in pursuit.

Around the library goes the strange chase; I am inclined to laugh, despite the gravity of the case, but realize that Smithers is in a bad fix, and needs assistance.

Several times she almost seizes him, but he escapes by dodging; chairs are tumbled over, and it sounds as though Bedlam had broken loose. Above all other sounds rise the sharp cries of the crazy creature, now worked up to a pitch of nervous excitement terrible to witness.

I hear a startled exclamation near me, and turn just in time to see Tom Cartaret throw one arm around his sweet wife, who has appeared on the scene, wild-eyed with mingled wonder and alarm.

The noise undoubtedly aroused her from sleep, and in her terror she has fled down-stairs. Thank God! there is no longer the shadow of a doubt between those two loving hearts—the past has been cleared up, and the future shines brightly.

I realize that something must be done to relieve Smithers, or else he will fall into the hands of his enemy. Three times they have passed me by; the woman does not seem to notice me, while poor Smithers has an appealing look on his face.

"Trip her up," he gasps, "or I'll shoot her!"

I do not want him to do this, and hence find myself obliged to carry out his orders. When she passes again, I suddenly throw out my foot, and the woman goes heavily to the floor. She is stunned by the fall, for she does not move. Smithers, breathing hard, pounces upon his late pursuer, and secures her wrists with a pair of steel bracelets, so that she may not be in a condition to do any further injury when she recovers her senses.

Meantime I turn up the gas. Tom is still clasping his wife tenderly to his heart, and I never saw a happier-looking man in all my life than he appears, with Madge's head nestling against his shoulder. It is almost worth passing through such darkness to catch the heavenly light that lies beyond.

I am unable to say a word; but, walking over, take a hand of each; then we three stand and speak with our eyes. What language could be more eloquent, since it comes from the soul?

Peace, with honor! Victory has crowned our efforts, and the mystery is solved.

We are disturbed by Smithers, who lays his hand on my arm. Turning around, I see his brown face glowing with the excitement of the recent chase—and something more. In the hour of my victory I am drawn to Smithers more than

at any previous time, such is the healthful effect of success.

"Peters, I want to shake hands with you, and congratulate you at the same time. You were right, and I was wrong. I have learned a lesson I shall never forget, and I had believed I was too old a hand at this business to pick up any new points, especially from a—"

"Greenhorn!" I finish his sentence for him with a laugh. "Ah, fortune favored me, my friend. I confess I believed as you did, but my hopes led me the other way."

I give him a look that tells him it is best to say no more on the subject now, for Madge is there, watching the scene in wonder from the protecting arms of her husband, who in a few words tells how we have suspected the truth and laid a trap for Rachel Babette. Never a word does he say about her own share in the exciting night's work—that will do to tell later, when the horror of the scene becomes but a memory.

Here we stand and talk until Tom leads his wife away to her room. When he joins us some little time later, we decide what is to be done with the wretched creature who has now recovered her senses, and glares at us, but utters no sound. She evidently believes she is once more confined within asylum walls, and her fear is great. Perhaps she also remembers the awful fire

that destroyed the building, and this causes fresh alarm within her poor brain.

It is soon decided that the best thing to be done with her is to carry her to the upper floor, where the windows are barred. Later on, Tom will see to it that she is taken to an asylum.

As for Tom, he cannot bear to look upon her; she has caused his father so much of suffering, and even been the cause of his death, and he never wants to see her face again. He will not touch her now; so that Smithers and myself have to see to getting her up into the attic. Of course, Tom is not vindictive—he cannot vent any ill-humor upon a poor, crazy thing, no matter what terrible crimes she may have committed; but I do not blame him when he hides his face with his hands, and, shuddering, cries:

"Take her out of my sight—I never want to see her again. She has been the curse of the house of Cartaret. My poor, murdered father!"

We spend the balance of the night in peace. Smithers appropriates a lounge down-stairs, and makes himself fairly comfortable, while I have my own room.

On the morrow the coroner comes with his jury. Nothing is kept back now, and he learns all, so that the verdict is speedily given.

It is a most unfortunate thing—no one can be blamed, and as nothing is to be gained by pub-

licity, the matter is kept as quiet as possible.

Tom is in a bad state. I consult the family doctor, who declares that if Madge wishes to keep her husband from a bad attack of brain fever he must be sent away at once, not passing another night under that roof.

At this Madge turns imploringly to me, and I assume charge.

The funeral is over, and old Luther Cartaret has been laid away beside his wife under the willows.

Tom yields to the urging of his wife, and hastily packs his traps. We leave the Cartaret mansion late in the afternoon, and taking a late train from New York, reach our old stamping-ground in Pike County by morning. There we find our dogs in fine trim, and begin the work without delay. As I expected, Tom braces up at once—his mind is taken from harrowing thoughts, and he escapes the threatened attack of brain fever, for which I am very thankful.

We have a pleasant two weeks of it in the woods. Game is fairly plenty, and Tom becomes his old self. He can finally look back upon the tragedy without undue excitement, thanks to the peaceful nature of the woods.

When our time is up we return, and Tom's wife gives me a look that speaks volumes, when

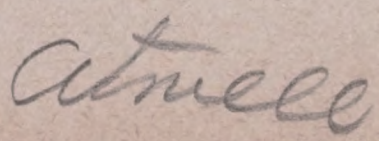
she sees her husband's face—the separation has been hard, but she feels amply repaid for it when she finds him restored to her, safe in body and mind.

I advise them to go South for the winter, and they do so. Uncle Jethro and Chloe are left in charge of the estate, while the young couple roam through Florida, Cuba, and Mexico. In the spring they decide on a long tour to Europe, and this has been lengthened so that they have been taking in almost every foreign country, sending home many choice articles of *bric-a-brac* collected by them, and which tell of considerable wealth and artistic taste.

Rachel Babette was placed in a private asylum, where she could be well taken care of. I have just heard of her death through Smithers, who tells me she recovered her mind at the last, but of course these years were a blank. We do not dream of judging her, leaving that for a higher power.

I have played detective no more since that eventful day, but often see Smithers, who seems to entertain a deep regret that I persist in being a poor lawyer, when I might have shone in his line. I am content.

THE END



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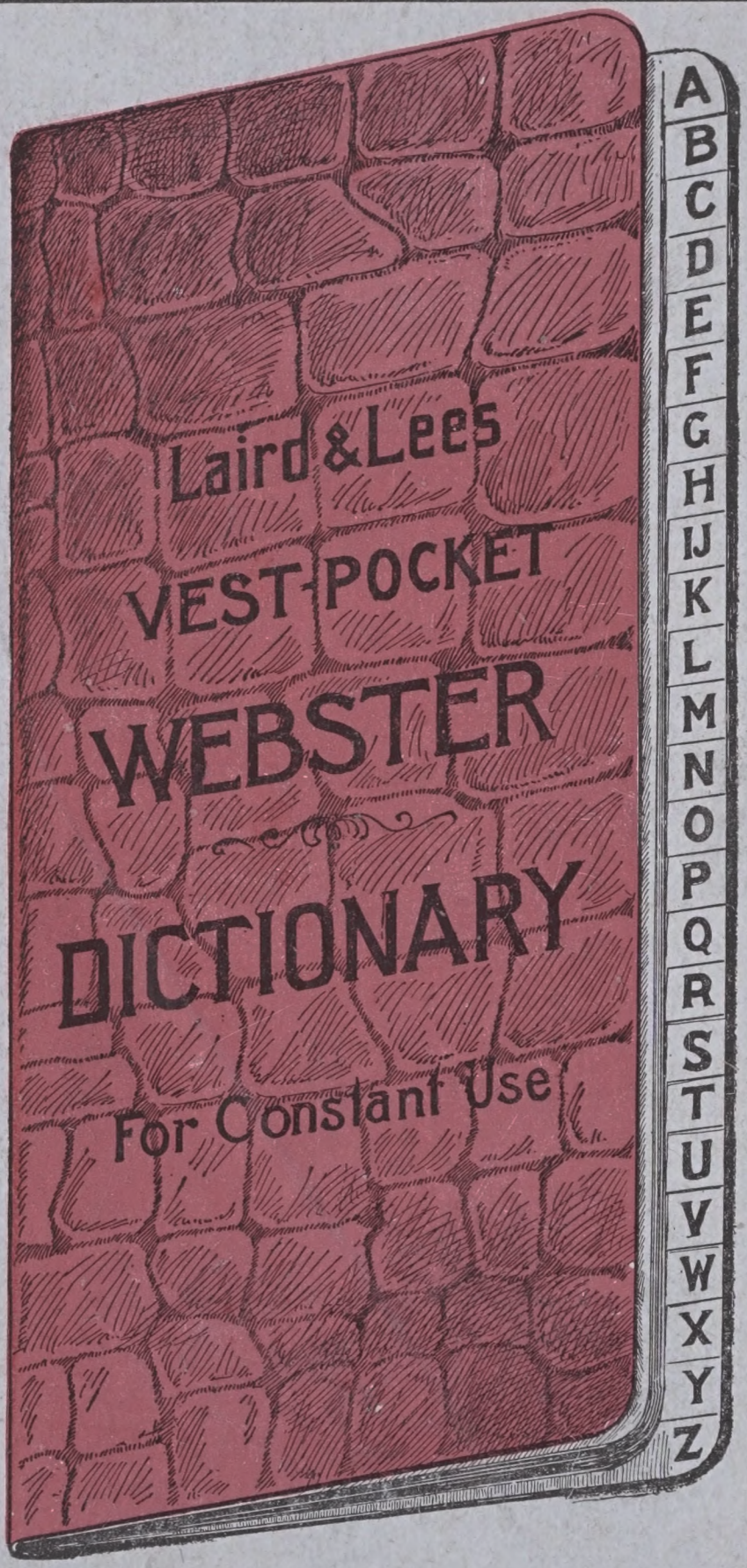

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